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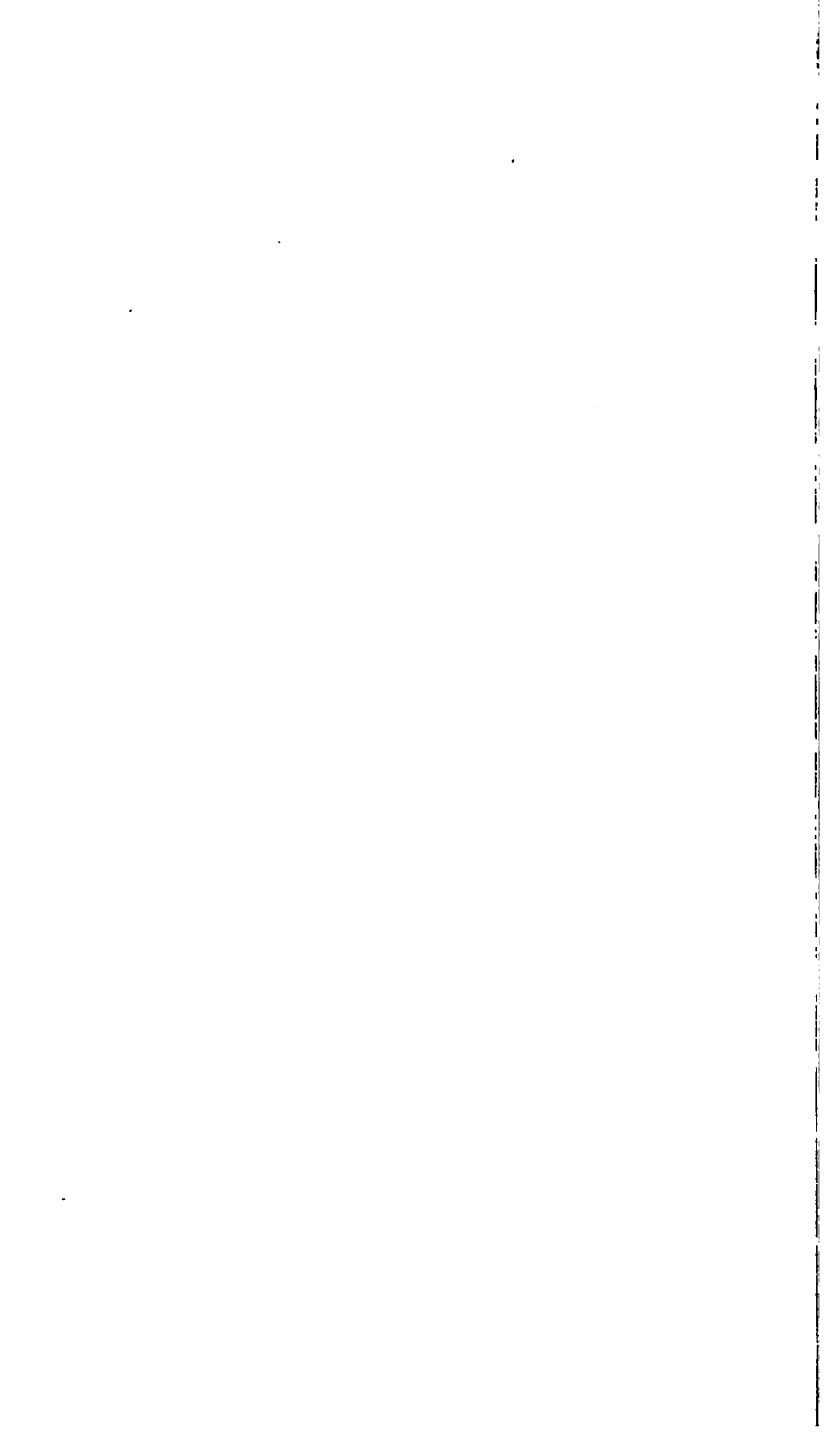
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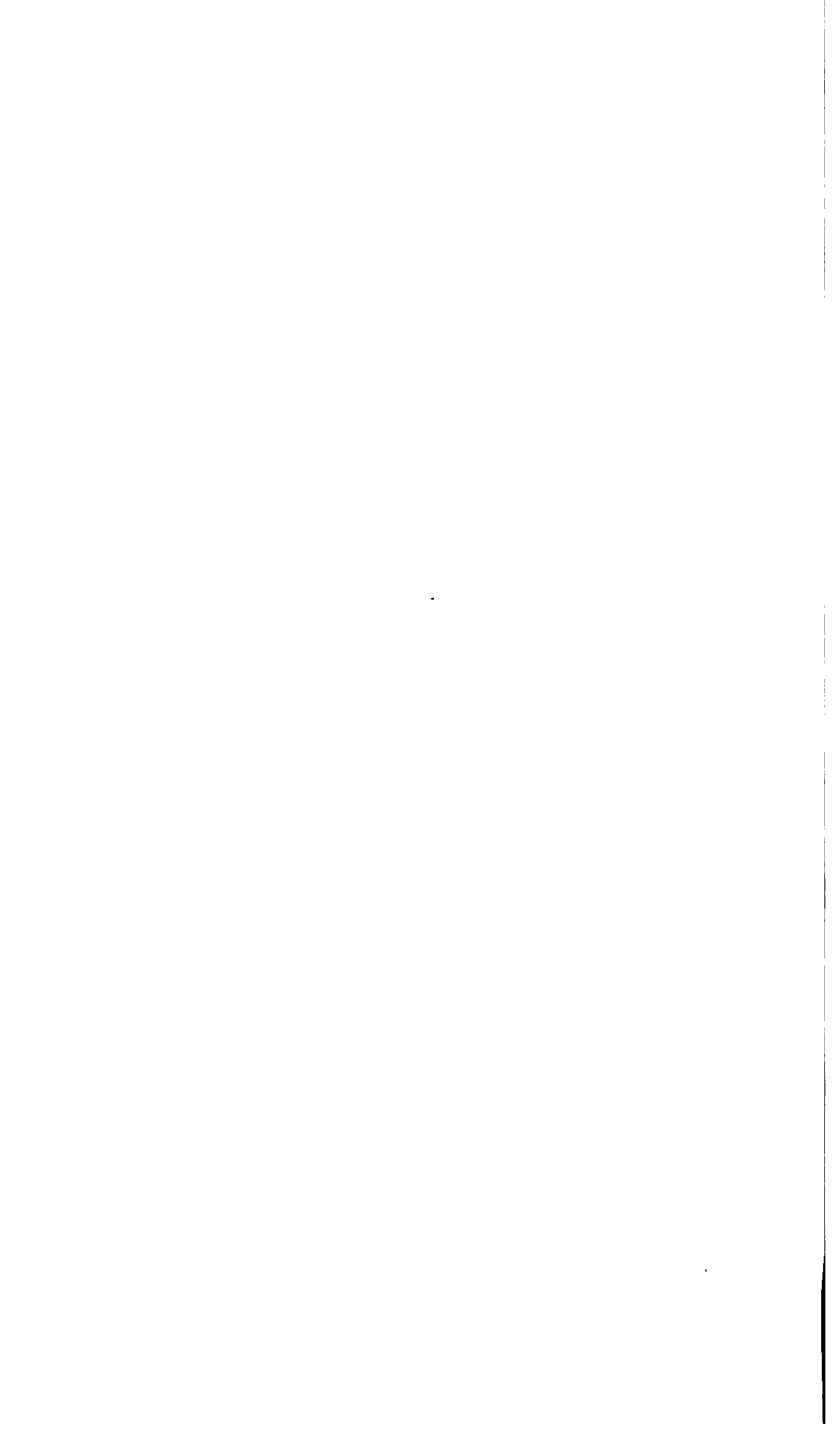


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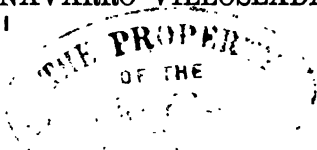


D O Ñ A B L A N C A
OF NAVARRE.

An Historical Romance.

BY

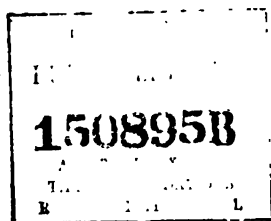
DON FRANCISCO NAVARRO VILLOSLADA.



C
IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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F

P R E F A C E.

THE Romance now introduced to the English reader has met with great success in Spain; and as it seems to us, together with some obvious defects, to possess excellencies of a high order, we have ventured to offer this version of it to the English Public, to whom we trust it will prove a welcome novelty. Its scene being laid in Navarre, during the troubles by which it was distracted in the fifteenth century, we have, at the suggestion of a Spanish friend, appended to the third volume, Quintana's Life of Don Carlos, the unfortunate Prince of Viana, whose name so frequently occurs in the story, in order that readers in this country, who are not likely to know much about the civil wars in that petty kingdom four centuries ago, may be better able to understand the nature of the political strug-

gles and family broils upon which the Author has founded his work. Independently of its serving to illustrate the story, Quintana's brief sketch of the life of Don Carlos possesses considerable merit of its own, and furnishes a very interesting account of one who was esteemed the most accomplished, as well as the most unfortunate Prince of his times, and who, like his namesake, the son of Philip, roused the sympathies of all Europe in his favour, but, nevertheless, ultimately fell, like him, a victim to his father's unrelenting cruelty.

We have not taken any intentional liberties with the text, further than mitigating slightly the southern tendency to bombast, and introducing or modifying a sentence or two, in a few instances where there appeared to be some obscurity or inconsistency in the story.

London, 48B Queen Anne Street.

May 23rd, 1854.



DOÑA BLANCA OF NAVARRE.

CHAPTER I.

THE autumn of one thousand four hundred and sixty-one was fast hastening into the withered arms of winter, when a comely and elegant peasant maiden made her appearance at the door of a cottage, in the skirts of the small town of Mendavia, in Navarre, where began the extraordinary events which we are about to relate. She seated herself on a rude stone bench beside the door, under the umbrageous canopy of vine leaves and golden grapes which crowned the thatched roof of the cabin, and immediately began to twist, with her small and delicate hand, a quantity of brown flax, fixed on a distaff which seemed to have been recently made; but her fingers, whose whiteness was enhanced by the dusky hue of the material she was spinning,

betrayed some degree of awkwardness in this rustic occupation.

She seemed to be about thirty years of age, and from her lofty bearing, as well as the singular beauty, regularity, and dignity of her features, she might have been taken for one of those Roman matrons who retired, without reluctance, into the obscurity of domestic life, from the most exalted station in the republic which swayed the ancient world.

At that period the town of Mendavia numbered eighty-two Christian families, and a few Jews, and belonged to the very puissant señor Don Luis de Beaumont, Count de Lerin, for the simple reason that the king Don Juan II.—whom the disturbed state of the country enabled to laugh at the cortes and fueros,—had taken into his head to wrest it from Don Íñigo de Stufiña, its lawful owner. It was not long since the town contained twice the number of inhabitants; for, besides the gentry, the peasantry amounted to more than a thousand; but the intestine wars which raged in the kingdom of Navarre, desolated Mendavia to such an extent that the number of families subject to the property-tax was reduced to ten, and these were very poor.

We mention this fact in order that the sagacious reader, after learning that the population of the whole

kingdom was diminishing in like proportion, may form some idea of the deplorable condition of that monarchy at the period in question.

One of the ten poor farmers who had survived the disasters of a civil war, apparently interminable, was Fortunio Garces, who, in conjunction with Aldonza, his wife, exercised that honourable profession which was, at the time of our story, regarded as one of the most vile and contemptible on earth. Such was the revolution that had taken place in the minds of men; although kings were remembered, and that at no very distant date, who grasped the sceptre with hands that had but recently guided the plough.

But neither their poverty nor social degradation could deprive Fortunio and Aldonza of the possession of virtues—virtues too, such as hospitality, which entail some pecuniary sacrifice.

A few days previously, the head of the fair peasant already described, was seen timidly looking over the farmyard fence, and as she was unknown to the whole neighbourhood, this occurrence naturally aroused curiosity. The worthy pair said to all who went to inquire into matters which ought not to have concerned them, that the new comer was sister-in-law to the aunt of the mother-in-law of their brother who dwelt at Dueñas, and that the brother of the mother-

in-law of their sister-in-law's aunt having died, the unfortunate maiden came to take refuge—where alone she could expect to find it—in the bosom of her nearest relations! The questioners were apparently convinced, which does not argue much in favour of their penetration; certain chroniclers indeed affirm that although these very cogent reasons did not altogether satisfy them, they at least held their tongues, which shows, at least, that they possessed prudence and circumspection in no small degree.

Even the exquisite beauty and pensive dignity of the fair Castilian's countenance were of themselves sufficient to inspire respect, while her extreme gravity and reserve sheltered her from all insinuations.

It was evening, it had rained, and the stranger was quite alone in the house; wishing, perhaps, to breathe the fresh air, and fearing lest sadness should take possession of her heart within that narrow, obscure, and wretched abode, she went out with the distaff at her girdle to continue her task at the door of the hut, from which was to be seen an extensive plain, fertilized by the tumultuous waters of the Ebro, and crowned by wooded hills, rising gradually in gigantic tiers, till, at length, they towered into lofty ranges of azure mountains. The handsome peasant-maiden wetted the brown threads of the flax rather with

tears from her eyes than moisture from her lips, turning her head ever and anon, apprehensive and trembling at the slightest noise which was heard in the neighbourhood, like a timid fawn that has more than once eluded the active pursuit of the huntsman.

But when she saw that no one observed her, and began to think that her apprehensions were groundless, she let the spindle fall from her hands, and taking the distaff from her girdle, tossed it away with a sort of majestic disdain ; her looks then wandered over the extensive plain, from which she raised them now and then to the heavens.

Her large eyes then shone with a gleam of melancholy joy, and her dark pupils dilated as if they would embrace the immense panorama with all the varied and enchanting beauties which Nature has lavished on that fertile region.

The coarse but pure white linen of the kerchief which covered her bosom fluttered like the silver leaves of the poplar, revealing the agitation of her breast, which gradually increased in intensity, till at length, unable to contain herself, she burst forth with plaintive voice into the following ejaculations :—

“ How beautiful are the fields to him who can look

upon them free from care, and enjoy their charms in ease and tranquillity. Oh, if anything could make me forget the woes and miseries of my past life, it is this soft perfume exhaled by the parched flowers, as they open their thirsty cups to receive the gentle showers which heaven sends to their relief. Bright is this atmosphere which my breast inhales; fair is this light which illumines my heart, this solitude where I have nothing to dread. Alone! O God, always alone, and at the mercy of strangers; thwarted in all my inclinations, even the most simple and harmless; divorced by my husband; unrelentingly persecuted by my own father; and deprived even of the consoling care of my brother, the only creature that I love, and whom doubtless for that reason they have so cowardly and basely entrapped, in order to bury him in a dungeon! There is not in the whole world a foot of earth where I can hide myself from my persecutors; and, nevertheless," she added, while she suddenly trembled as this thought occurred to her, "nevertheless, perhaps all that I see, is mine!"

Doubtless the possession of what she beheld could not be obtained without some new and terrible calamity; for when her mind stumbled on that idea, she felt a moral commotion similar to the physical

shock which is produced by contact with an electrical body.

"Carlos!" she proceeded, her eyes swimming in tears, "Carlos, my brother! will our enemies be satisfied with immuring thee in prison, and with pursuing me in order to deprive me of liberty? What does my heart forbode with this melancholy which consumes it? Carlos, dost thou perchance listen to the plaintive accents of thy sister, while thou smilest at the woes of life from the place which God has destined for the eternal repose of the just? Hast thou left me thy misfortunes as an inheritance, together with all thy rights?"

The gentle peasant would have said more, would have further cleared up the enigma of her first words, if she had not risen suddenly, fancying she heard some unwonted noise.

"Great God," she exclaimed, with anxiety, "I hear footsteps within the house; perhaps it is the poor old woman who watches over me with so much affection. My enemies know not that I am concealed in this place; it is the fear, the apprehension in which I have lived for so many years, which excites my imagination and conjures up these sounds."

The hand of the sublime painter of nature was then tracing a rainbow in the east, and the fair peasant

became sweetly absorbed in the contemplation of that magnificent and welcome meteor, always consoling, and now, more than ever, to her a presage of happiness.

Nevertheless, the noises continued. Two equestrians, clad in complete armour, had penetrated into the house by the back door, which looked upon the farm-yard, where Aldonza happened to be at the time. The old woman wished to give the alarm, but when she saw a dagger at her throat, she thought it best to keep silence.

The disguised maiden would have heard the rattling of their armour, if her attention had not been at that very moment attracted by a gallant youth, who came towards her from the plain, regarding her with looks of fondest affection.

This was the son of Samuel, one of the Jewish inhabitants of the town; soon after the fair Castilian had made her appearance in Mendavia he was converted to Christianity, receiving in baptism the name of Ximeno, because Ximena was the name of the lovely stranger.

These two facts, told in their naked simplicity, save us many paragraphs of hyperbolical exaggeration, regarding the deep affection which was treasured up in the heart of the quondam Israelite. We have only

to remark that his passion, perhaps because it was so strong, was kept within the limits of respect. Perhaps the peasant maiden discovered the profound impression which her beauty produced ; perhaps she was not offended at the discovery ; but she took good care not to encourage a passion which was impossible, absurd, insane.

Poor Ximeno, if he could but have suspected the abyss which yawned between them ! Fortunately he did not know it ; and ignorance is the consoling balm of half the human race.

While both were conversing in a friendly manner outside the house, one of the cavaliers was observing within, through the bars of his closed visor, the countenance of Ximena ; and he even applied his ear, but he muttered curses on the artizan who had loaded his helmet with so much iron as to prevent him from hearing a single syllable of the conversation between the two peasants.

It was plainly indicated, by various symptoms, that the companion of the curious observer cared little about making any discovery, for, confining himself to watching the terrified old woman, he gave now and then evident signs of impatience, and even of disgust.

“It is she, Sancho,” said the former, in a low voice, and with some agitation.

"Impossible, Mosen Pierres," replied his impatient companion, in the same undertone.

"Are you beginning now with your everlasting mania for contradiction?"

"I will begin and I will maintain, in the teeth of the best he in Christendom, that this is not the person we are in search of."

"Then do you know her, Sancho?"

"I don't know her, nor do I require to know her."

"But do you know who it is we seek?"

"How the devil can I know when you only said to me: 'Friend Sancho, perhaps we shall have to come to blows with the Beamontese, because we are going to carry off from them the most beautiful woman on the banks of the Ebro. I know that you have no equal for such feats.' I mount my steed, I come, and—I don't see that *that* has any appearance of a lady, but rather of a wretched peasant damsel unworthy of the honour of being carried off."

"Oh! unless you have other evidence, Sancho, I think appearances deceive you. *That*, as you have expressed it with such energetic contempt, *that* which seems to you a peasant maiden is a lady."

"Impossible!"

"A lady of high degree."

"Do you take me for a child?"

"A princess."

"Constable!"

"And perhaps she is a queen."

"Go on, and you will end by making her a goddess."

"Brother Sancho, if I were a partizan of her's I would say to you, 'This is your queen,' and you would have to kneel before her and worship her as you would worship God," said Mosen Pierres de Peralta, with all the monarchical enthusiasm of that period, when kings were regarded as divine, while they were treated as worse than human.

"For whom then do you take this woman, who seems to me to have bewitched you?" asked the warrior, with curiosity and wonder sufficient to make him advance and place himself near the aperture through which the Constable was looking at those who were tranquilly conversing outside.

"Unless I am deceived by my eyes, which have not seen her for many years, she is the daughter of our sovereign Don Juan II. of Arragon and Navarre."

"Doña Leonora de Foix!"

"Doña Blanca de Navarre."

"What! the Princess of Viana!"

"Yes, the sister and heir of the rebellious and unfortunate Carlos, prince of Viana, whom the Beaumontese party have acknowledged and proclaimed as our lawful king and natural sovereign."

"I repeat to you that it cannot be. The princess Doña Blanca must be at present in some village or other in Castile ; but whether it is she or not we lose nothing by carrying her off and transferring her for a few days to your castle at Peralta, where she will receive hospitalities more worthy either of her lofty lineage or of her beauty.

"If this is not Doña Blanca of whom I am to take possession in name of the king her father, I should be very sorry for the sake of a peasant maiden, to run the risk of entering into conflict with the whole garrison of Mendavia, now strengthened by the arrival of the Count de Lerin."

"We shall soon have our doubts solved," said Sancho, and then advancing three paces in the hut, and seizing the old woman by the throat with one hand, he added fiercely, "Now accursed hag, tell us the truth, or with my two fingers I will wring your weasand as I would a pullet's ; who is this girl that you keep in your house?"

"Sir, she is a relation of mine," answered Aldonza, trembling all over.

"Devil's dam, thou liest," interrupted Sancho, pressing slightly with his thumb and forefingers, which felt like iron pincers. "And, don't scream," he continued, "for if I squeeze a little more you will never utter another syllable."

"For God's sake let me go, sir knight. In truth she is no relation of mine ; but I don't know her, believe me, good sir. A gentleman brought her here, like you, with his vizor closed ; he gave a large purse to my husband, Fortunio, spoke with him, and departed without making himself known."

"What was he like?" demanded Mosen Pierres.

"I did not see his face, I solemnly declare, any more than I see yours."

"Was he little, not very stout, with a harsh and dry voice?"

"Yes, sir, yes."

"The Count de Lerin," said Peralta. "Nevertheless, I yet fear I may have made a mistake. There is great danger of having the whole garrison of the town upon us."

"And why not if we are armed?"

"But do you not perceive that we have thrust ourselves into a rebel town which belongs soul and body to this old Count de Lerin, chief of the partisans of the prince and princess of Viana, in opposi-

tion to the king our master? Do you not see, with your infernal obstinacy, that the nearest town belonging to our party is distant three mortal leagues of road more level than this meadow, and that the troopers of the count might overtake us?"

"Do you know what all this means in plain vernacular?"

"It means," answered Mosen Pierres de Peralta, "that I have not seen Doña Blanca since the day when she was married at Valladolid to Prince Henry of Castile, and I am afraid her features may have been effaced from my memory."

"A pretty method of excusing oneself," answered the headstrong Sancho; "it is all fear and nothing else."

"I vow to Saint Fermin, our blessed patron," exclaimed Mosen Pierres, with ill-repressed rage, "that when I manage to get this troublesome affair off my hands, I shall chastise you for your insolence."

"Then we shall not be long in getting it off our hands. Do you doubt whether the comely peasant damsel chatting with that youth, who seems to be a novice from the monastery of Leyre, is the princess? I shall quickly find it out."

"In what way?"

"You shall see. Come, venerable witch," added the gruff soldier, "what is the name of that girl?"

"Ximena, sir."

"Well, I grant a truce to your wizened throat for an instant, in order that you may call your guest with a loud voice."

"Ximena," cried the old woman with a hoarse and tremulous accent, to which she tried to give a particular kind of modulation, as if in that single word she endeavoured to combine a warning, a reproof, and a dismissal."

The maiden made a slight gesture as of shrugging her shoulders, then turned towards the hut her countenance still smiling and serene, and bade adieu to the exulting youth.

"Doña Blanca, Doña Blanca," immediately exclaimed the stern warrior in a voice which thundered through the confined limits of the hut.

But before he had pronounced the name a second time, the princess had already darted off, uttering a piercing shriek, and ran wildly towards the hermitage of our Lady of Legarda, which rises in the centre of the plain, and near which was grazing a herd of bulls.

Ximeno followed her close, vainly endeavouring to arrest her with his voice.

"Sinner that I am, do you not see," said the Constable, "that your cursed obstinacy has scared the game?"

"By no means," answered Sancho, with great coolness, "when the dove escapes from the nets, we take a cross-bow, and with the point of a bolt it is overtaken in the midst of its upward flight."

"What are you going to do, unhappy man?"

"Let fly at her. After all, for what purpose does the king want her, but to give her a dose that will settle her, as he has done to her brother, the prince of Viana?"

"She is the daughter of your king; stop, we must get possession of her without causing her the slightest injury. You don't know it—it is a necessary condition for a certain matrimonial alliance. But do you not see? it is now too late. A bullock leaves the herd, runs towards her, pursues, overtakes her—the princess has fallen on her knees—the bull attacks her—alas! alas! there is now no remedy."

There issued from the hut a shriek of terror which burst from the lips of only two of its inmates.

The proud animal, bellowing with rage, excited perhaps by the bright colours of the princess's apron, was now lowering its head to pierce her with its

pointed horns, when the robust youth who followed her, suddenly interposed between her and the bull, and engaged with him in a furious and desperate struggle, which could not have lasted long, but quick as lightning a bolt came sharply hissing through the air, dexterously sent into the heart of the brute, which, doubling its knees beneath the herculean arms of Ximeno, fell weltering in its blood.

That bolt, as our readers may suppose, had issued from the cross-bow of Sancho, who, on hearing Mosen Pierres de Peralta exclaim that there was no salvation for Doña Blanca, merely to prove to him the contrary, discharged the bolt with the same indifference that he would have shown if he had aimed at the heart of the princess.

The latter fell senseless with terror and agitation, and the two cavaliers had no difficulty in carrying her to the cabin, where they placed her in front on the best of their horses, and rode at full speed down along the Ebro.

CHAPTER II.

THE chronicler of this rare history relates that the newly converted Israelite remained like one who sees visions ; and certain manuscripts of a friar of Irache, who died in the odour of sanctity, add that the ruffians who so uncereemoniously took possession of Doña Blanca, really seemed to him phantoms, goblins, or spectres of evil omen. And in truth such rapidity in action, such parsimony of speech, and such facility in carrying off princesses, must have been, even to the good friar who only knew of them from hearsay, devilish arts and works of enchantment rather than things natural and usual—how much more then to Ximeno, before whose astonished eyes they passed like a dream !

Mauled by the bull, exhausted in strength, alone, and without any other arms than his bruised and naked hands, he could offer no resistance to the

destroyers of his happiness. However, he was doubtless indebted to his very debility and helplessness for his life, which, although it did not seem to him at that moment a very valuable possession, must nevertheless have become less burdensome in the course of time.

And time sped quickly.

"I must rescue her; I must live to shed for her the last drop of my blood."

Such was the determination of the youth when he recovered from his stupor, and in his countenance, hitherto gentle and timid, appeared indications of courage, boldness, and energy, which communicated to his features a new expression and a new beauty.

Wonderful is the facility with which man forms resolutions, especially such as are evil, and not less marvellous is the difficulty of putting them in execution, especially when they are good. This reflection, which is certainly not derived from the monk of Irache, has occurred to us while transcribing the words of the son of Samuel, who, after giving utterance to them, seemed as confident as if he had all that was required to effect the rescue of the princess, and avenge her of her enemies.

Between the head and the heart of a young man there does not lie that appalling space interposed by

reflection, which years render deeper and deeper until it becomes an abyss.

"Where have they taken Ximena? who are her persecutors? why have they torn her away from the house of her relatives? who is she? who am I that I should undertake to rescue her? what means can I employ for the happy issue of my enterprize?"

These are the reflections which the youth found it convenient to omit. To none of them could he give an answer. This was the abyss yawning at his feet.

But for all those questions he had a vague, instinctive and satisfactory answer—

"I will know it all; I will save her at the cost of my life."

Ximeno, then, had advanced half way towards the accomplishment of his design.

And such was the force of his will, that forgetting his bruises, his fatigue and prostration, he proceeded to the cabin with a bold countenance and a firm step.

"Aldonza! Aldonza!" exclaimed the youth, even before he reached it, with a full and strong voice, which the old woman did not recognise.

"Aldonza!" he shouted again, at the threshold of the hut.

"Come—in—sir," answered in three breaths, the

good woman, who came out sobbing, with the corner of her apron at her eyes.

"Sir, to me!" then you don't know me."

"Simon—I mean Ximeno. They have not killed you!"

"Oh, it is not time to indulge in lamentations, Aldonza;" said he, interrupting her with a superiority and firmness of tone of which no one would have thought him capable, "Did you know those men?"

"No."

"What did they say to you?"

"I don't know what they said to me;—I know what they did to me."

"Have they forgotten any weapon, — anything whatever?"

"They put an iron clasp on my throat."

"Oh! I think they have unsettled your wits:" answered the son of Simon impatiently. "Answer," he proceeded, "answer, for heaven's sake,—did they say anything:—what name did they give one another?"

"Sancho! Sancho is the name of my tormentor;" said Aldonza, whose liveliest recollections corresponded with her most painful sensations.

"Sancho! very well. What is he like?"

"He is a fiend clad in iron, and so strong!—a stub-

born mule always disputing—I understood nothing; but whenever the one said yea, the other said nay.”

“You know nothing further, then, than that one of them is called Sancho, that this Sancho is obstinate, muscular, and given to disputation?”

“Nothing else.”

“Has your niece or kinswoman any lover, any enemy, who is called Sancho?” asked Ximeno, his eyes kindling with revenge.

“Unfortunate woman that I am! What could induce me to receive relations that God has not given me?”

“Then who is she?”

“How do I know?”

“Who brought her here?” said Ximeno, with wild energy.

The old woman looked at him with amazement, and could scarcely believe that she had before her the humble Jew, her old acquaintance.

“Who brought her here?” repeated the youth, in an irresistible tone, putting one of those questions which extort the answer ready made.

“Our master, the Count of Lerin,” answered Aldonza, as if she had let a weight fall from her mind.

Scarcely had Ximeno heard these words, when,

without uttering a word, he suddenly turned his back, and with the same rapid and determined pace as before, with the same bold expression of countenance, he left the hut, and began to ascend the steep which led to the embattled circuit of the town.

What was his intention?—to see, perhaps, Count de Lerin, the constable of the kingdom, chief of the Beamontese party, lord of that territory, and more powerful, perhaps, in Navarre, than the king himself, against whom he had rebelled.

The design, which would never have entered his head even in dreams a few days before, now seemed to him natural, simple, and feasible.

He passed, then, under the lengthened arch of the south gate, and turned to the left, along a street, terminating in front of the principal façade of the castle, whose last tower, lofty and slender as the pine which springs from the brow of a precipice, has been overthrown, in our own time, on the impulse of revolutionary rage, which devours in a day what might have furnished food for the teeth of centuries.

The respectable inhabitants of Mendavia who met Ximeno, looked after him with a sort of gesture which signified :—

“What is the new Christian about now, that he passes us without any sign of humility?”

And shrugging their shoulders they went their way half surprised and half offended.

This same arrogance must have been also of service to him by making the sentinels, pages, and squires, with an instinctive movement, throw open to him the gates of the castle.

A ruddy page, who, as we shall afterwards see, must have been a stranger in the town, entered a spacious and dark chamber, modestly furnished with oaken benches and chairs; and having looked round in all directions, he turned to go out, after he had reached the middle of the apartment, without having found what he was in search of, when a slight and opportune cough caused him to stop, take off his cap, and direct his steps respectfully towards the place to which he had before advanced.

"Sir Constable," said the page to a little man enveloped in a tunic lined with white fur, and buried in an enormous leathern chair, who was writing before a table still more enormous, on which fell horizontally the rays of the evening twilight.

He of the fur tunic raised his head, and two small, quick and piercing eyes sparkled in the penumbra.

"What is the matter?" answered the Constable of Navarre, or Count de Lerin, with a dry but hoarse

and cavernous voice, which seemed to come from a giant stretched on the floor.

But before proceeding further, we must, in order to prevent confusion, inform the reader that among the numerous evils which civil wars bring in their train, they also, by way of compensation, occasion great advantages; and one of these is that the republic possesses duplicates of the principal offices. It is not usually the better served on this account, but in return it enjoys the satisfaction of paying the double number of servants.

Mosen Pierres de Peralta, the faithful vassal of the king, Don Juan, thought himself as much Constable of Navarre as the Count de Lerin who made war upon him. If they had lived in our time, we should have given to one of them the epithet of *titular*, or the prefix of *ex*; but as they have had the start of us by more than three hundred years, in coming to the world, it does not seem prudent to make late and useless innovations.

Let us now take up the thread of our story.—

“Pardon me, Sir,” said the impertinent page, “I did not see you.”

“If I am not seen,” said the count, somewhat piqued, “I can make myself felt.”

“Sir,” added the page, discreetly waving the ques-

tion, "a youth has come here coarsely clad, in the guise of a peasant, but with the countenance of a prince, and he orders with so much dignity that I could not help admitting him —"

"As far as the vestibule."

"Here."

"Bah!" said the count, smiling. "Well, if you could not help admitting him here, it is not right that you and the prince should make your exit by the balcony."

The page went out trembling, after making a profound obeisance to the count.

That smile, and the jocular tone so rare in his master, turned him pale as a sheet.

Nevertheless, the good page had no reason to be alarmed; those symptoms were the natural effect of one of the few moments of internal satisfaction which men so restless and turbulent as the Count de Lerin enjoy.

Don Louis de Beaumont was not less distinguished in war than eminent in politics, not less valiant than sagacious, but he was also unprincipled in a corresponding degree. It is unfortunate that the fame of a great captain and profound politician is so rarely accompanied with a reputation for uprightness.

To describe this personage in one trait, we would

say that he was the Cæsar Borgia of his times, if Cæsar Borgia had not existed at the same period with the Constable, and, indeed, five lustres after this, died by the hands of the count's partisans in the neighbourhood of this same town of Mendavia of which we are speaking. But since the above description cannot be correctly applied to him, we may say with more propriety and correctness, that Count de Lerin was the Cæsar Borgia of Navarre.

He had just then given the finishing touch to a letter which he had begun with visible political satisfaction, and concluded with not less evident literary satisfaction ; and at the happy moment when ambition and self-love were emulously smiling upon him, the page came and interrupted him with his strange embassy.

The count had scarcely uttered his last words to the servant when he again turned to enjoy either his phrases or his schemes, passing his eyes over the parchment, which ran thus :—

“ To our very dear, much-loved, and excellent
Count de Pallars.

“ The news of the death of the king, our master, Carlos the Fourth (heaven rest his soul) has afflicted our heart ; the more so as we know that it was not the will of God to call him to himself so soon, unless the hand of his sister and his stepmother had inter-

fered, and with poisonous herbs frustrated the lofty designs which the Divine Being had reserved for the unhappy monarch. We have also to deplore the unheard-of robberies, assassinations, and other atrocities perpetrated in our territories, by the bandit Sancho de Rota, and by which we are deprived of our most loyal friends and most accomplished cavaliers. But amidst so many calamities we can console ourselves with the certainty of the triumph of our holy cause, in whose name we have taken possession of the good towns of La Guardia, San Vicente, Los Arcos, Lumbier, and Viana, from the castle of which last the haughty Mosen Pierres de Peralta, went out, clad in mourning, by one gate, whilst we were entering by another, covered with glory.

“ In like manner we owe to God the good fortune of having in our possession the most illustrious princess Doña Blanca, whom we must proclaim our queen and natural mistress, as heir to the rights and titles of King Carlos, her brother.

“ With this view we mean to summon all the grandees, prelates, barons, and magistrates of the good towns of Navarre, to assemble at the Cortes and elevate upon the buckler the most illustrious and magnificent princess of Viana ; wherefore it is necessary that you again raise the war cry in the territories of

the principality of Catalonia, where I trust you will prove more successful than four months ago, and at least endeavour to give occupation to the forces of the king, Don Juan, while the Cortes are performing their duty in the kingdom.

“The unfortunate princess, Doña Blanca, who, like her brother Carlos, and for the same crime of being heir to the crown, has been persecuted from her cradle, knows nothing of our just designs; nay more, she knows nothing of the death of her brother. It has seemed convenient to me to conceal from her the former, in case her timidity and filial scruples might oppose obstacles to our scheme, and the latter for the greater security of the former, and not to afflict still more her lacerated heart.

“After I had rescued her from captivity she did not wish to shut herself up in one of my castles, and prefers living disguised as a peasant, with a plebeian family who do not know her, and where she enjoys a liberty she never knew before.

“She is safe, then, and in good keeping, and by the favour of God and yours, she will soon quit the coarse garments of the peasant to clothe herself in the royal purple.

“Inform of everything your friend and brother, who prays God for your health. Given at my castle of

Mendavia, the fifteenth day of the month of October, in the year 1461.

THE CONSTABLE."

Long before the author had completed the revision of his work Ximeno was in the apartment.

The count heard the noise of his steps, but nevertheless he did not raise his eyes from the parchment until he had rolled it up with scrupulous care.

This affected absence of mind, or intended discourtesy, was of much service to both parties ; it enabled the entrant to recover from a certain agitation caused by the darkness of the room, respect for the personage before him, and a sudden ray of light which showed him the hazardous nature of his undertaking ; while it gave the Constable an opportunity of casting at his visitor a furtive glance from head to foot.

"Come forward," he said to the youth, who remained motionless near the threshold. "What ! have you already lost that audacity which carried you to the very door of my chamber ?"

"Sir," answered Ximeno, with sincerity, "I could be bold until I saw you."

Such an answer would have disarmed the count, even in his moods of ill-humour, which were these most habitual to him ; and we may therefore easily

imagine the good effect it produced at the present moment.

"Come, you have talent and courage—two things which are often enough not found together," answered the count, remembering that they were united in himself in so eminent a degree. "Approach," he added, softening his voice. "Who are you?"

"I am the son of Samuel, a vassal of your highness."

"What do you want?"

"Revenge!—No, no, sir, justice."

"Well, these honest Mendavians, as they are such good Christians, have, I suppose, played you some scurvy trick, poor Jew?"

"Sir Count, Jesus Christ is my God."

"You are right; I see you wear the dress of a Christian, and I thought you ——"

"Sir, two soldiers have just carried off a woman ——"

"A peasant girl, eh?"

"Yes, sir, she seemed to be a peasant."

"What perversity! I declare these people cannot remain quiet a single day. As usual, after an assault comes a scuffle—and then a skirmish—and then—. I promise you that my soldiers have no time to amuse

themselves with such frolics. And was she your sister?"

"Oh! more than a sister."

"Your wife?"

"Sir," answered Ximeno with sudden energy, fancying that he was letting a mountain fall down upon the count, as the gods did upon the giants, in order to be revenged for the contempt with which he had received the news of the crime which had been committed,—“Sir, this woman is Ximena, she who lived with Fortunio and Aldonza.”

The youth kept his eyes fixed on the Constable, waiting to see the terrible explosion which he supposed must follow his words.

The count remained silent for a moment, then shrugged his shoulders, arched his eyebrows, pursed his lips, and with the most indifferent gesture and the most tranquil accent in the world, replied—

“I don't know her.”

The son of Samuel, visibly disconcerted, gave a step backwards.

The intelligence which Don Louis de Beaumont had just received was the most disastrous which could at the time be communicated to him: it levelled all his schemes to the earth, overwhelmed, annihilated him, and nevertheless it produced on him no visible impres-

sion. Perhaps he received in the depths of his soul a most violent shock, but he held sufficient command over himself to maintain in all circumstances an imperturbable serenity of countenance.

Thus, the surface of the sea remains sometimes smooth and tranquil as a mirror, while its depths are in agitation, and heaving from the shock of opposing currents.

Cæsar Borgia, and no one else, could have done as much, but neither Cæsar nor any one else could have done more.

"When you entered," continued the count, "I was finishing a letter ; wait, as I don't wish to delay dispatching it."

And without waiting an answer from the astonished youth, the Constable rose with the roll of parchment in his hand, and left the room, with measured steps, by a secret door.

As he crossed before Ximeno he really seemed a dwarf, but in the eyes of the youth he took the proportions of a colossus.

"Well," thought the princess's lover, "perhaps he restrained himself, from fear of being overheard by indiscreet 'squires ; but when he returns, good heavens, what will be his rage !"

A minute after, the Constable of Navarre returned,

with all his former composure and stateliness, his robe of fur sweeping the ground.

"How long is it since you embraced the true faith?" he asked the youth as he approached the window.

"Two months."

"And who converted you?"

"Ximena."

"Some nun?"

"No, sir; Ximena — that Ximena," the youth ventured to say, while his amazement bordered on stupefaction.

"Who?"

"She that was carried off."

"Ah! I had forgotten."

The count slightly turned his head, and cast his eye over the immense level tract of country which stretches as far as Viana.

"It is obvious that my hint has roused him," thought Ximeno, "and he is meditating some important resolution."

"There is an abundant vintage this year," said the count, slightly yawning.

"Sir! and do you say this to me?"

"What! are you not a farmer?"

"But Ximena; good heavens! Ximena! where is

she? Who are her ravishers? Why do you not think of ascertaining it? Why do you not chastise them? Are we not your vassals? Are you not Constable? Do you not administer justice?"

"And what have I to do with your concerns, you miserable race of slaves,* who dare to flutter like insects around our castles, and buzz with fruitless lamentations? Do we not leave you hands for your own defence, a dagger to revenge yourselves, and earth where you may bury your enemies? Must your master descend to rescue what you allow to be wrested from your grasp? Must he anxiously guard your honour,—an honour which God denies you when he tosses you into the world?"

"Oh!" exclaimed the son of Samuel with all the rage of a hundred oppressed generations; "You are right; with our hands, with daggers, and with graves, we need ask nothing from our masters; fortunately, if God has denied us honour, he has given us courage in full measure."

The count listened almost with pleasure to these ill-disguised threats, and threw alternately scrutinizing glances at the plain and his interlocutor.

* The peasantry in Navarre might almost be considered such at that time.

"What road did the ravishers take?" he asked abruptly.

"Down along the river."

"Were they cavaliers?"

"Cavaliers they must have been," said Ximeno with bitterness.

"In armour?"

"Cap-à-pié."

"Can you give any other indications?"

"One of them is called Sancho, and is strong, obstinate, and quarrelsome."

The count smiled almost imperceptibly. He could not be ignorant that there was a Sancho in Navarre who made a boast of his obstinacy, and carried on the border of his shield these significant words, "A nay for a yea." Ximeno was not aware that he had completely described a character in a single sentence. The whole mystery was now made clear to the count.

"Sancho! Sancho!" repeated the latter, as if he wished to recal something; "there is not, perhaps, a more common name in Navarre; there is, for instance, the famous bandit Sancho de Rota, who ——"

"Bandit!"

"Yes, bandit of the Bardenas ; but valiant, daring, reckless. Tell me, was your Ximena beautiful?"

"As an angel."

"Of a certainty it is he."

"What?" interrupted Ximeno, with the rage of jealousy.

"Oh, don't you know his tricks? Do you not know how far he extends his raids in order to carry off the handsomest maidens in the plains?"

"And he is called Sancho de Rota?"

"Sancho de Rota ; but he is very brave."

"And he frequents the Bardenas?"

"Yes, towards Tudela ; but recollect, he is a fiend incarnate."

"Sir Constable, thanks for the information. He is brave, and is not a cavalier ; he may not refuse to be the antagonist of a peasant."

The youth departed with still more resolution than he came, but with his heart envenomed by hatred, jealousy, and a burning thirst for revenge.

When the count saw him cross the threshold of the door, he exclaimed with desperation,—

"He will deliver me from Sancho de Rota, but who will rescue the captive queen from the hands of her father?"

Nevertheless the count had not been negligent.

While he was listening to the quondam Jew with such apparent coldness and indifference, with so much assumed displeasure, Carlos de Artieda, one of his partisans who stood highest in his confidence, sallied forth with twenty lances, by his orders, in pursuit of the ravishers, and Aldonza and Fortunio had disappeared from the town of Mendavia.

It is not known what the count did with the latter, and no further notice is taken of them in this story.

CHAPTER III.

THE royal Bardenas of Tudela, hills bristling with tall pines and gigantic rocks, and which extend from that city to the kingdom of Arragon, were once celebrated for the banditti with which they were infested.

So frequent and dreadful were the crimes which were perpetrated in those pine forests from the remotest period, so ancient and traditional the indispensable existence of a captain of banditti in that wilderness of thickets and crags, that, for a circuit of five leagues, all the castles, farmhouses, and shepherd's huts were uninhabited, having been abandoned to the mercy of the robbers; and the twenty-five towns of the district formed themselves into a confederation for the purpose of pursuing them in combined operation, it being one of the terrible articles of their compact "that if any of the malefactors were caught *in flagranti* they should be hanged without waiting for an order from the king or the courts of justice." Such cruel regulations were fruitless, perhaps, on

account of their very cruelty ; the bandits continued to succeed one another from generation to generation with the same order, the same regularity that princes follow one another in an established monarchy, whose origin is hid in remote antiquity.

The last king of those mountains was called Sancho de Rota, and had eclipsed the infamous renown of his predecessors by the multitude and enormity of his crimes, and, above all, by his extraordinary recklessness and successful daring.

About the middle of October, one thousand five hundred and sixty-one, that desolating scourge, the terror of the kingdoms of Arragon and Navarre, disappeared, and the rumour began to circulate that he had been killed in single combat—a piece of news that was not very consolatory to the inhabitants, who calculated with certainty that he would soon find a successor.

In reality they had not to wait long. At the head of a hundred bravos appeared a formidable warrior who made the fame of Sancho de Rota dwindle by the echo of his ferocious deeds, which were, however, accompanied by the display of generous qualities. We can say little of his personal aspect, for he rarely raised the visor of his helmet, and never laid aside his armour ; he was distinguished only by his bravery

in battle, and when his lance or sword were unemployed, his elegance and courtesy justified the superiority which he exercised over the others. Like a noble and mysterious paladin, and as if he had forgotten that he commanded a troop of banditti, and not a company of soldiers, he had painted on his shield a device which no one could interpret or explain.

A short time after he had taken the command of that ruthless band, and scattered terror from the Ebro to the Pyrenees, and from the ocean to the lofty Moncayo, not without exciting the wonder and admiration of his own comrades, he was seen issuing tranquilly at the head of his troop from the rugged and broken region which he had never left before, except for rapid and nocturnal incursions ; and what is more strange, he was seen descending into the immense plains of Peralta without being molested by any of the towns belonging to the hostile confederation.

Hitherto that empire of barbarians, established within another civilized empire, had never held any other alliances than those of the arm with the sword, nor possessed any other friends than the caves, rocks, and abandoned castles, the depths of impenetrable pine forests, and the rugged recesses of mountains ; while the prisoner who offered the probability of a good

ransom, the traveller who carried a well-lined purse, were their chief enemies. Never had there been raised among them any other banner than that of extermination, nor any other war-cry than that of death. How then did they now pass along these towns with lance in bucket, and their pikes on their shoulders reflecting the rays of the sun? Why did the inhabitants of those desolated districts, far from shutting their doors and windows, present themselves there, and regard them with an expression, in which were blended curiosity and wonder, past terror and the expectation of future tranquillity, the pain of former wounds and the hope of not receiving any more?

In order to satisfy these and other doubts, we shall have to return again to our story, in which, without knowing how, we have advanced inopportunately.

It was one of the days in the last week but one of October, when Sancho de Rota, preparing for a certain *coup-de-main*, which he had to strike at one of the towns in the county of Lerin, was waiting for the night with sufficient impatience to make him curse twenty times in a minute, the slowness with which the sun was descending to the Cantabrian sea.

The king of the mountains was as much devoured with ennui among his rude vassals, armed with leathern

cuirasses and iron skullcaps or helmets, as the most powerful constitutional monarch in the midst of his responsible ministers. A man, on whom time hangs heavy, is the frailest creature on earth—incapable of resisting any temptation, which presents a hope of dispelling his tedium.

The devil then tempted Sancho de Rota to kill time by gaining from his vassals all the money which he had before distributed among them. This also was a royal occupation. Ferdinand the Catholic and the emperor Charles V. amused themselves all their lives in gaining from their nobles the masterships, commanderies, and baronies which their predecessors had lavished on them.

One of the most powerful elements of ennui is the power to do everything to which our inclination leads us; but this rule has nevertheless its exceptions. On the present occasion, when Sancho de Rota found in his soldiers materials adapted for seconding his designs, and began to play at the gate of the castle of Eguarás, a minute after the thought occurred to him, it must be confessed that he was amused by the monotonous exercise of filling and emptying the dice-box.

There was a sufficient reason why this should be the case. Every time that the captain of the

robbers tossed the pieces of ivory on the table, he put two or three hundred coins in his purse ; and as man, even although a highway robber, is naturally prone to selfishness, there was nothing to prevent the winning Sancho from having his laugh when he saw the rage of his losing companions.

“By the horns of Beelzebub, the captain can rob even those of his own profession.”

“I vow to St. Cain, that he has stripped me of my last farthing.”

“A thousand devils take me, if I do not slay him this night.”

Such was the angelic chorus which regaled the ears of Sancho de Rota ; who, without caring a straw for these threats, answered—

“Well, comrades, do you so soon acknowledge yourselves plucked ? I am ashamed of commanding such poor devils. By Barabbas, I cannot conceive where you bury all the treasure I divide among you. Come, you wretched crew, shell out the money which you are doubtless treasuring up in order to found monasteries.”

No one produced a single cornado.

“By heavens, you dastard knaves, why don't you take your revenge. Hang me if I know where to stow away so much money.”

All remained silent.

"I vow to St. Cernin of Pampeluna, that there is still too much day light for us to think of setting out yet on our expedition, and you will force me to enter the castle and listen to the whimpering of the damsels I have imprisoned there. Well, either you must play, or I will try to belie the proverb that 'those who win at play lose at love.'"

"Twenty florins," said one of the bandits, emptying on the table a leathern purse, which he then flung away disdainfully.

The captain rattled the dice with a certain air of satisfaction, while he threw covetous glances at the heap of money.

"Three," he said, as he emptied the box. "The number is low, but I have such luck that I am certain you will get but one!"

"Five," answered the challenger, throwing the dice without having scarcely given them a shake.

"Sblood! you see how my luck deserts me."

"Forty florins," added the new player.

"Hilloah! you play double stakes? Forty be it."

All the bystanders began to feel interested in behalf of their captain's antagonist.

"Eight," cried the former; "poor devil! I pity you!"

"Nine."

"Bravo! good! good!" shouted all, unable to restrain themselves, and for the first time they fixed their eyes on the winner.

His armour was well known, but they could not see his face; he kept his vizor down.

"Eighty florina."

"The devil!" cried Sancho, with a voice of thunder, "there has not been a higher stake this whole day: you are a cool hand. Eh! my absent friend?"

He of the vizor said not a word.

"Eighty be it."

The captain shook the dice more than he was wont, and turned them out with a certain suavity.

"Blanks! all blanks!" exclaimed all present, crowding more and more around the table.

Sancho de Rota turned pale with rage. His adversary gathered the dice calmly, and with his accustomed indifference scattered them immediately on the table.

"Twenty."

"I vow to twenty thousand legions of devils, in whose clutches I wish you with all my heart, that, the son of my mother will stand this no longer," said Sancho, trying to get out of the crowd.

The attempt was not easy ; the robbers, gradually more and more interested in the struggle, which now assumed such gigantic proportions, naturally took part with the inferior, and all exclaimed with one voice—

“Play ! play ! you must play with him while your gains last !”

“Very well,” answered the captain, who with all his authority, and all his contempt for laws, human and divine, did not dare to violate the code of honour, “I swear by Saint Fermin, patron of Navarre, that I shall not stir from this spot as long as I have a single cornado.”

His pride being now piqued, he went much beyond what was strictly required of him.

“Well,” he added with the box in his hands, how much do you stake ?”

“A hundred and sixty florins.”

“A hundred and sixty florins !” repeated Sancho stuttering. “It does not matter, you will lose. Don’t you see ? Seventeen ! seventeen, poor devil !”

“Twenty again ! twenty ;” all shouted in amazement at such persevering luck.

Sancho was silent ; he quivered with rage, his teeth chattered, he felt all the symptoms of a tertian ague.

"How much now?" he said, gathering the dice almost convulsively.

"Three hundred and twenty florins," answered the man in armour, with his usual indifference.

"Stop—I don't know if I have enough; there must be wanting—"

"No matter: all that you have against the three hundred and twenty florins."

"Agreed! I throw."

The most profound silence reigned among those hundred men, so closely grouped; but it was soon disturbed by a violent thump on the table, and a frightful blasphemy.

Then followed prolonged murmurs, and loud tushes from the bandits nearest the centre, who ordered silence so that they might not lose a single word of that exciting scene.

The captain this time got two.

There was not a single witness of that strange contest whose heart did not throb violently, because there was none who did not foresee a catastrophe.

Meanwhile, the outlaws were asking one another in whispers: "But who is the captain's opponent?"

"Chafarote. Don't you see the cut which he received the other day on his back-piece?"

"Certainly; but Chafarote has, begging his pardon,

a rather clownish look ; and then, Chafarote is one who never passes two minutes without wetting his whistle, whereas we have never yet seen this person moisten his clay."

"Silence ! he is throwing."

He of the vizor, in fact, threw the dice with the same good luck as before.

All seemed to think that there was something providential in that continued run of good fortune, and began to regard the winner almost with fear, as was evident by their deep murmurs, their agitated movements, and the instantaneous impulse with which they surrounded him, keeping at a respectful distance.

"You have ruined me," said the captain, with a calmness much more terrible than his former rage.

"Not yet," answered his adversary.

"Would you like to stake our lives on the game ?" replied the bandit with a treacherous smile which was lost in the covert of his enormous moustaches.

"We can play for our lives afterwards, but not with the dice."

"What more do I possess which can excite your cupidity ?"

"Sundry fair damsels immured in this castle."

"Bah ! bah ! I give you them all into the bargain,"

said Sancho, with the same ironical smile, which might be divined by the movement of the moustache, as we discover the passage of a serpent by the agitation of the grass.

"I do not wish to be indebted to you for anything," answered the fortunate player, without any change in his manner.

"Be it so then, but we must understand one another. You will stake against the women—that is to say, against the money which may be given me for their ransom—"

"That money does not belong to you, it belongs to the whole band, and I only play against you."

"You are right! you are right!" they all cried.

There is nothing in the world more popular than the right, when it comes in aid of self interest. The captain saw that his adversary, not satisfied with his florins, wished also to deprive him of his fame.

Nevertheless, he pretended to feel no concern. He had taken a resolution by which he meant to gratify both his hatred and envy at once.

"Let us know then what we are to play for," he answered, with a degree of mildness which astonished all who knew how little regard he had for the angelic virtues.

"You must stake the right of retaining your women

until their friends come forward and offer a reasonable ransom for them."

"And at how much do you estimate this right," said the captain with contempt, for he did not understand what value the office of gaoler could possess.

"At a miserable couple of florins, eh?"

"I value it at all this heap of gold which I have gained from you."

"At five hundred florins?"

"Five hundred."

"Are you mad, you thieving hound?"

"Captain, I have wherewithal to pay for all my insanities?"

"Do I throw?"

"Throw."

"I have lost."

"I have gained. Have you anything more to stake?"

"Yes," answered Sancho with hoarse accent, "this dagger against your helmet."

"Why so singular a stake?"

"To gain your casque, deprive you of it, and know who you are."

"Do you not know your own soldiers? do you not know Juan Marin, otherwise called Chafarote?"

"No, you are not Chafarote, although you wear

his armour and his clothes, and I swear to you by the eleven heavens that it shall never be said of Captain Sancho de Rota that he lost a cornado to an unknown antagonist."

"It is Chafarote," cried those who were farthest off. "Is it not plain enough? he does not raise his visor because he was sentinel at the oak forest, and does not wish to be punished for leaving his post."

"This is not Chafarote," answered those who were nearest, "he has not that lip, nor such firmness and composure of mind."

Here the chronicler employs entire pages in discussing what was the most simple means of solving the grave question which was raised by Sancho de Rota; and after a long and prosy tirade, he winds up by saying that in his opinion the readiest way was to raise the visor of the problematic person's helmet. Nevertheless, and with submission be it said to the authority abovementioned, we think that history, on this as on other occasions, furnished a better *dénouement*, by presenting at that moment, on the top of a rising ground, nothing less than the real Chafarote, or Juan Marin in person, although clothed in hose, short-wide breeches, rude sandals and smock frock, like any other honest peasant of the mountains.

On seeing him appear in that dress—the costume

of honest men—which contrasted oddly with his roguish and malicious air, there was discharged at the luckless wight a volley of jeers, coarse jokes, and loud laughter which would have been sufficient to disconcert a person of less quickness than Chafarote, who quietly said—

“Well, comrades, what means all this wonderment? You look as if I were a witch harnessed for the stake.”

“Tell us, tell us the secret of this extraordinary metamorphosis,” said several, approaching the new comer.

“How did you allow yourself to be disarmed?” shouted Sancho de Rota in an authoritative tone.

“Softly, friend; I vow to Beelzebub one can’t go to Rome in a day, nor was Zamora taken in an hour. Give me a draught of the red wine of Peralta, if you wish me to be good for anything.”

“There can be no doubt now; the real Chafarote is the Chafarote who calls for drink,” observed a wag who had neither read Plautus nor Molière.

It was given him, and after having drained the cup with great gusto and deliberation, he wiped his lips with the sleeve of his tabard, coughed, and spoke in these terms:

“When I was standing sentinel a peasant came

towards me: Back!—Anything but that. I aim at him with my crossbow—whiz, I miss him; he throws himself upon me in two bounds, fells me to the earth, strips me, ties me to an oak, asks my name, encases himself in my clothes and armour, and so good bye. I struggle, burst my ligatures, put on the dress he left, arrive, and there's an end of it."

"If the orator wanted eloquence, neither did he sin in prolixity."

"A traitor!"

"A spy!"

Such were the exclamations with which the banditti burst forth, unsheathing their swords or daggers, and turning against the intruder.

"Let me see who will catch him and hang me him up to the bough of an oak," said the captain.

One of the robbers ventured to put his hand on the shoulder of the Unknown, who drew his dagger, and quick as lightning buried it in the other's breast.

The robber uttered a hoarse inarticulate cry, and fell over upon his adversary, who, giving him a push, tossed him to one side, already a corpse.

All this passed in an instant.

"Coward!" exclaimed the stranger, brandishing the red and smoking dagger. "Miscreant! I have gained your money and your women, I have humbled

your pride, and have you not courage enough to deprive me of life?"

"Traitor! take your reward," retorted Sancho, discharging at the forehead of his enemy a tremendous two-handed blow with the axe which he had at his side.

The Unknown tried to evade the blow by leaping aside, but his armour, unfortunately, deprived him of the necessary agility; he raised his hand to his head, almost whirled round twice, and then fell headlong with a tremendous crash.

A smothered female scream issued from one of the loopholes of the castle.

The blood streamed through the visor of the disguised warrior, whose skull seemed to have been cleft by the stroke.

The robbers beheld this spectacle almost with regret, which was as much as could be expected from men accustomed to such scenes of horror.

"What! traitor, do you think that playing at dice is the same as playing at weapons with Sancho de Rota? Did you suppose that I had not always the security of this requital?" said the captain, speaking to the prostrate body of his enemy, as if he could hear his insults and avenge them.

Suddenly the stranger rose, to the astonishment of

all, lifted both his hands to his head, took off his cloven helmet, which he tossed away in anger, when stood revealed the mild and beautiful countenance of Ximeno, his mouth and nostrils streaming with blood. The blow had caused no other mischief than a cerebral disturbance which left him stunned for a few moments.

The bandit turned against him, thinking to cleave his head at one blow, but the princess's lover, now disembarassed of the piece of armour which impeded his vision, was enabled to avoid the blow by giving a bound with the agility of a stag, and then seizing the captain by the waist as Hercules did Antæus, he raised him with his brawny arms until he no longer touched the earth, and dashed him to a considerable distance before he could make use of his weapon:

"The same, the same way as with me by St. Jago," exclaimed Chafarote; "now he has only to plant his foot upon him, bind him, fasten him, and then quietly strip him. Heavens! what iron arms," he proceeded with enthusiasm; "let giants attack him and he will throw them over his shoulder like bundles of straw. By my halidom, there is not a more gallant fellow in Christendom. But, deuce take it, the captain is getting up. How he foams at the

mouth ! How he whirls his battle-axe ! The youth retreats. Coward ! Yes, let loose a blood-hound upon him."

In reality Ximeno when he saw his enemy get upon his feet and brandish his formidable weapon, hastened along the plain, not to abandon the field, however, but to escape the blow and seize an enormous stone with both hands. Thus armed he waited with a firm step for the captain, who came bellowing with rage, and brandishing the axe with such furious gestures, that he might have cleft an entire oak at one stroke. Ximeno remained tranquil, balancing with both hands the ponderous block, which he suddenly discharged with the force of a catapulta against the naked forehead of the robber, who fell on his back, uttering a shriek which was echoed again and again by the rocks.

The conqueror rushed up to the body of his antagonist, and placing one foot on his arm wrested from him the weapon which he still grasped convulsively, and severed his head from his body at a single blow.

The Goliath of the mountains was thus overcome by the David of the plain.

A piece of white linen was now seen waving at the same narrow loop-hole from which the scream had

proceeded, and, whether from chance or design, it fell at the foot of the wall of the solitary castle.

Ximeno saw it, and doubted not for a moment that it was thrown down by his adored Ximena in order that he might wipe the blood and sweat from his face, which he accordingly did, directing to the window glances of ardent love and gratitude.

"You have no longer a captain," he then said to the banditti, who remained dumb with terror; "I wish to have that post; if any of you dares dispute it with me I wait him here."

No one stirred.

"Well, then, if none of you be braver than I, I have a right to be obeyed. I shall divide with you my gains on the strength of our being now friends and comrades. For you the gold, for me the women," said Ximeno, proudly, and with battle-axe in hand he advanced to the castle.

The robbers all shouted with one voice "Long live our new captain! Long life to generous and valiant warriors!" and the past terror and silence were succeeded by murmurs of applause, extravagant praise, and joyful acclamations.

CHAPTER IV.

THE captain of the robbers, according to the chronicles, entered alone into the castle or fortress of Eguarás, situated in the heart of the Bárdenas; and he entered alone, not because he was despised by his men, who were, on the contrary, disposed to follow him to the world's end; but because they had to comply with a divine precept and perform a work of mercy, by dividing among themselves the five hundred odd florins, and burying the dead.

Without any other guide, therefore, than the sentiments of his heart, Ximeno ascended the stairs of the castle, whose smoky walls, covered with clumsy and obscene figures in chalk and charcoal, presented a spectacle which was rendered still more disgusting by the stench which they gave forth.

The edifice did not belie the character of its inhabitants.

Wherever Ximeno came to a closed door he burst it open with a single blow of his axe. At length he

fancied he heard the sweet voice of his beloved calling on him with open arms. It was all an illusion of his heated fancy. He found several female captives groaning in the recesses of their obscure chambers ; a number of veils he lifted with daring hand, supposing that they might conceal the afflicted countenance of his Ximena ; but in every instance he retreated, knitting his brows in desperation and heaving deep sighs, until a new obstacle arrested his progress and awakened fresh hope in his bosom.

He was already tired with ascending and descending stairs, with going in and coming out, turning and returning ; a thousand times had he called the name of his beloved at the threshold of the different apartments, and as often had he been answered by a disheartening silence. He was revolving in his mind horrible and desperate thoughts of vengeance, when he unexpectedly stumbled on Chafarote, who had in the meanwhile, received, drank, played and lost the two florins and a half which had fallen to his share.

"Captain," said the bandit obsequiously, raising his hand to his peasant's cap, "if you desire it I will act as your guide through this labyrinth."

Juan Marin was not vindictive ; the exploits of Ximeno had effaced from his memory the violent

appropriation of his armour, and the usurpation of his name.

"Chafarote," asked the new captain, going straight to the object which had drawn him thither, "do you know if Sancho de Rota was yesterday at Mendavia?"

Chafarote shrugged his shoulders, and made a negative sign with his head.

"He must have gone with only one companion."

"It is possible."

"And brought here a female captive?"

"I think I have seen him a day or two ago bring home a nice morsel."

"A creature like an angel?"

"I have never seen angels, captain, and, to be frank with you, I don't expect to see them; but if the angels had seen the girl I speak of, they would assuredly have turned their back on heaven to look at her."

The captain let this profane hyperbole pass without reproof, because in his mind the peerless beauty of his Ximena was a sufficient excuse.

"Ah! that must be she I seek," said the youth, letting much of his anxiety and vexation escape in a sigh; "and where is she?"

"Come with me."

The captain followed Chafarote through the obscure corridors of the castle.

“Do you not know whether she was captured at Mendavia?”

“At Mendavia!”

“Yes; why do you stop?”

“Because what you say makes me recollect that this girl said sundry things about Mendavia which I have forgotten.”

“Go on, go on; are we not yet at her apartment?”

“We are not far from it.”

“Do you know if her name is Ximena?”

“Ximena!” answered the bandit, stopping a second time, and catching his nether lip with his finger and thumb in a thoughtful manner.

“Well, what? but walk on while you are telling me.”

“To tell the truth, when I saw her I was a little merry, for I am rather of a jovial humour; but I could swear that she did say something about some Ximena or Ximeno.”

“Make haste; are we never to reach the spot?” interrupted the captain, treading on the heels of his guide.

“We are before the door.”

“Oh!”

The sagacious reader may imagine the force of the two-handed blow the lover dealt with his axe, in order to force in the door.

"Ximena! Ximena!" exclaimed the eager youth, casting his eyes all round in a moment.

A woman standing in the loophole which lent a scanty light to the apartment, advanced with her arms open, and prostrating herself before the newcomer, embraced his knees and exclaimed with a sorrowful accent,

"Is it you? are you our generous deliverer, to whom so many unhappy creatures are indebted for both life and honour? I saw you from this window, I heard all your words, admired your heroic valour, understood your noble intentions. Thanks, brave sir, thanks in the name of heaven, thanks in the name of my father, who died without avenging me!"

The captain folded his arms with terrible calmness, and answered not a word.

It was not Ximena that embraced him.

"You are silent," pursued the prisoner, rising; "My God! Have I deceived myself? In changing my master have I only changed my executioner! Oh, no! it is impossible! The words which I heard, the deeds I have witnessed, are those of a true cavalier, of a hero, they are not those of a bandit."

"Chafarote," said the captain, turning his face with still a ray of hope, "is this the woman you spoke of to me?"

"It is, sir."

"Are there any others in the castle?"

"I have seen all the doors open, consequently—"

"Very well, go."

"What shall I say to my comrades?"

"To make ready for this night's expedition."

"Who is to lead us?"

"I," answered the captain, with a look of anger and fierce determination.

"I vow to Barabbas," said the bandit to himself, "I was afraid he was going to show weakness; but I have a notion that the youth has real mettle in him, and will even leave Sancho de Rota far behind him."

"Señora," said Ximeno, when he was alone with the captive, "you have made a mistake; I am not a cavalier, and, to tell the truth, I detest the whole order; and I think it is not necessary to belong to it in order to comport myself with bravery and generosity. From this hour you are free."

"If you are not a gentleman by birth, you are so by your virtues," answered the fair unknown, with an enthusiasm which would have been a sweet recompense for the noblest exploit in the world.

"I have been told you spoke about Mendavia," said the captain, modestly turning the conversation; "will you inform me whether you were taken prisoner there?"

"I was on my way to Mendavia from Bearne, when the banditti took me captive."

"And, if I may be allowed to ask, what were you going to do at Mendavia?"

"Sir, I was going to be married," answered the girl, suffused with the hues of shame, which, in a maiden's countenance, appear, vanish, and reappear like the intermittent light of a pharos.

"Were you coming alone?"

"With my father and an old woman who was my friend."

"Where is your father?"

The lovely maiden tried to answer, but her utterance was choked with sobs.

"Is he dead?" asked the captain with interest.

"He died in my defence, but you have avenged him."

"And the old woman?"

"She also is gone," she answered, with renewed sobbing.

"Do you feel her death so much?"

"Sir, to my father I owed my being, and to my friend my happiness."

"Your happiness, that is your marriage?"

"Yes, sir."

"And to whom were you going to be married at Mendavia?"

"To the son of Samuel."

"What do you say?"

"To Simon, the son of Samuel the Jew."

"To Ximeno?"

"Yes, you are right; he is now called Ximeno. Do you know him?"

"A little—by sight," replied Ximeno, who fancied he was in a different world to that which we inhabit.

"Oh! I am certain that if you have ever met him you must have loved him."

"Must?"

"He is upright, brave, noble-minded, handsome, and graceful to a surpassing degree."

"Perhaps you exaggerate his good qualities."

"Oh no!"

"You know him intimately, then?" asked Ximeno, fixing his astonished look on the countenance of his intended bride.

The eyes of the youth, gradually accustomed to the obscurity, now saw perfectly, and admired thoroughly, the beauty of the unknown maiden.

"I have never seen him."

"And nevertheless you praise him with so much confidence."

"Although I have never seen him I think I should know him."

"What is Ximeno like, do you imagine?"

"Sir, if I was not afraid that you might think me bold and flattering, I should say that Ximeno resembles you."

"Me! The deuce!" added the youth to himself, excited in the most lively manner by so singular an adventure. "Can I be the dupe of a designing woman? Does Ximena put my love to the test by this artifice? And does Ximeno," he asked aloud, "know the happiness which awaited him by his marriage with you?"

"No, he is ignorant of all this."

"But he knows you, at least?"

"No."

"Then why did you expose yourself to the dangers and inconveniences of the journey, when you could not rely on the certainty of the marriage?"

"But I did rely."

"So, then, you were certain?"

"Yes."

"Oh! I think you are deceived in this," said the youth, with a sigh, recalling the image of his beloved.

" I am certain I am not deceived."

" You counted on the consent of his father ?"

" Not yet."

Ximeno began to think that the woman was mad, and regarded her with looks of compassion.

" You relied on your beauty ?"

" Ah ! by no means."

" Then I swear to you, that a month ago you would not have done ill in leaving all to your own fascinations," said the young man, while his former recollections were struggling with his new impressions.

" And if I could a month since, why not now ?"

" How do I know ?" answered the captain, a little confused ; and then added, changing his tone, " But if you did not count on him, nor his parents, nor your own attractions, on what did you build so many hopes ?"

" That is my secret."

" Recollect that if I have, according to your own acknowledgment, been generous towards you, you ought to be so towards me."

" Then I will tell you all. My confidence was founded on the word of an old Jewess, who passed for a witch."

Although superstition was so common in those

days, Ximeno could not help smiling, as an *esprit fort* of our own times might have done.

"So that you were going to get married by means of sorcery?"

"No; I was going to marry for love."

"Do you love Ximeno?" asked the latter, with emotion.

"Oh!" ejaculated the fair unknown, with a sigh which might have excited the envy of the happiest man on earth.

Ximeno was silent; he was confounded; he did not know what to say or what to think. If it was a deception, how agreeable that deception; if it was truth, how dangerous that truth.

"I have satisfied your curiosity, sir," said the unknown maiden with melancholy sweetness. "I could not at this moment prove to you in a more effectual manner all the gratitude I owe you for your favours. You will now confer on me a great additional obligation by enabling me to leave this castle."

"Where do you wish me to take you?"

"To Bearne,—to Mendavia,—anywhere; it is all the same to me now."

"How?"

"I have lost my father—I have lost the friend who accompanied us. I have nothing now to lose."

"But do you speak seriously?"

"That question offends me," answered the fair captive, with dignity.

"Pardon me, señora, but you do not know how extraordinary is all this to me."

"Perhaps I have been too easy in confiding my secrets to you; but you told me that you knew Ximeno; I saw displayed in your countenance, in your words and actions, a noble mind, a generous heart, and a valour that can dare everything; your arm has delivered me from the assassin of my father, and your generosity from those who might have designs on my honour; you come to free me from captivity—alas! I have no other means of manifesting my gratitude than by reposing in you that confidence which a good friend and an honourable man deserves, and by satisfying the curiosity or the interest which prompted you to inquire into my history."

"Thanks, thanks," replied Ximeno, who had listened to her with devout attention.

He was not less desirous of knowing on what her assurance was founded than of ascertaining its amount.

"Tell me, I entreat you," he continued, after a short pause, "who induced you to love Ximeno?"

"The Jewess."

"The witch?"

"Rachel."

"Rachel! ah," said the youth, placing his palm on his forehead, "Ximeno has an aunt who is called Rachel."

"The same. You know all about his family. You must be well acquainted with him?"

"Almost as much as you."

"This is a new claim to my confidence."

"Oh! continue to favour me with it, and I will endeavour to deserve it."

"What do you wish me to speak of?"

"This Rachel often talks to you of me—of my friend Ximeno?"

"Constantly."

"But for what purpose?"

"Poor Rachel!" she replied, suddenly assuming a compassionate air and a more tremulous and touching accent, "poor Rachel is an old Jewess, the butt and laughing-stock of her fellow-creatures. In her wandering life she suffered insults, privations, and afflictions, and she allowed herself to be regarded as a witch, solely in order that she might have a protection against ill-usage. Accordingly, she was feared by many and loved by none. I was in the service of the Countess de Foix, at her castle of Orthez in Bearne, when Rachel came to our door benumbed

with cold and almost dead with hunger. I felt so much pity for the poor old woman that I took her up to my chamber, gave her food, dried her wet rags at the fire, and, not satisfied with that, I insisted that she should fix her residence in the village, engaging to share with her my food and clothing. This was accordingly done, and you cannot imagine how much goodness, how much tenderness, I discovered in the depths of her heart, which though steeped in the waters of adversity, was still kept pure and fresh, and overflowed with kindness and generosity. The antidote which preserved it from bitterness was doubtless the image of her nephew, Simon of Mendavia. How she loves him, and how she grieves at not being able to live beside him ! ”

“ But why did she not fix her residence at Mendavia ? Why did she not repair to the house of her kinsmen ? ” asked Ximeno.

“ The relatives of Rachel were much opposed to her living in the village with them, because, as you will see immediately, the old woman had so much power over them that she could have soon deprived them of their son. Rachel, therefore, sacrificed her happiness in order that she might not compromise that of her nephew. But this did not prevent her from disappearing now and then from Bearne, and

walking barefoot, with only her staff as a companion, across the Pyrenees to the banks of the Ebro, to look from a distance at Simon when he was working in the fields, or contending at throwing the bar* with his companions, all of whom he excelled in strength and dexterity as much as he surpassed them in comeliness and grace."

"In fact, I recollect—I say I think I have heard Ximeno speak of a beggar who sometimes came to him weeping, and asking alms, when he was ploughing in the fields of his master, alone and far from the village, and he always shared with her his crust of bread. He also related how he afterwards used to find gold coins in his pockets, in his implements of husbandry, and even in the furrows which he turned up; and, of course, Simon fancied that the money so found was sent by God as a reward for his acts of charity."

"It was nothing more than the gift of his mother's sister; it was only the fruit of Rachel's savings and privations," replied the maiden, fixing her ardent gaze on the countenance of Ximeno, in which wonder and tenderness were expressed. My father, squire to Don

* Throwing the bar resembles the Scotch game of throwing the hammer, only the *barra*, which is of iron, must fall on its point.

Gaston de Foix, the eldest son of the count and countess, regarded with equal affection the Jewess, whose greatest pleasure was to talk of her nephew. She spoke much and often of his goodness, his bravery, his gallantry, and his warm heart. 'If you were not a Christian,' she repeated a thousand times, 'with what pleasure should I see you united with him by perpetual ties! How happy would you be! For Simon, Simon,' she pursued, 'is predestined of God for extraordinary deeds. Simon must issue when I think fit from the wretched atmosphere which he now breathes. Simon will surely become a hero, and annihilate those who may oppress him. Love Simon, my child, for Simon is worthy of thee, and thou art worthy of a prince.' Without perceiving it, I gradually shared in the infectious enthusiasm of the old woman, and together we dreamed, together we conjured up bright visions of happiness and glory. However, my imagination did not dwell peacefully for any length of time on the love of the son of Samuel, because difference of religion clouded my hopes and aspirations. But, a few days since, Rachel learned that her nephew had suddenly embraced Christianity."

"Ha!"

"Ines," said the old woman to me, "there is a God

who has created you for one another, and against whose omnipotent arm no obstacle can avail when he wills the destiny of man to roll onward in its triumphant career. Simon is a Christian, and however much I may grieve at this, I know that he must needs have become a Christian, because he was destined to be your husband."

"Did she say that?" interrupted Ximeno, who seemed enthralled as by the words of a sybil.

"Yes; she said that, and, taking her staff, she added, 'Let us go, let us go, and say to Samuel that I wish his son to be your husband. Samuel must be silent and obey me, as Simon must be silent and obey his father.' Such was the faith, the authority which her words inspired, that my unhappy father did not hesitate to follow her, any more than I who am much more unhappy for having survived them."

It is equally impossible to tell or to guess what was passing at that moment in the mind of Ximeno. He comes to the Bardenas, mingles with the banditti, provokes Sancho de Rota, triumphs over his antagonist, and, when he hopes that the rescue of Ximena will be the reward of his victory, he lights on a woman who irresistibly enchains him, and with syren accents makes him forget, for some brief moments, even her for whose deliverance he braves so

many present dangers, and a long vista of crimes and horrors in the future.

Crimes, yes! What does the Jew of Mendavia do after the death of the robber chief? Return to his father's house with the empty laurels of his fruitless valour? If he has need of many arms in order to wrest Ximena from her enemies, - if, in order to revenge himself for the indifference and contempt with which the Count de Lerin listened to his complaint, he requires to be as powerful and formidable as the count himself, ought he to throw away this opportunity of placing himself at the head of those men, the readiest and fittest instruments of hatred and vengeance?

No, in order to discover Ximena, it was necessary to go from town to town, from castle to castle, breaking open gates, bursting bolts, penetrating even to the most secret and mysterious haunts of modest retirement; and a bandit only can do all this. In order to be revenged on the count, it was necessary to burn his forts, ravage his towns, deprive him of his bravest captains, carry terror to the very gates of his castle, and death to his very hearth; and, therefore, not having been born a Pierres de Peralta, or a Marshal of Navarre, both mortal enemies of the count, and as powerful as himself, the son of Samuel the Hebrew

must of necessity assume the leadership of the banditti.

In palliation of Ximeno's resolution, we might add that, in those times, there was very little difference between a feudal lord, the head of a powerful party, and a captain of brigands. They and their followers perpetrated the same crimes, only the one could commit them with impunity, and without exposing themselves to anything further than reprisals, and the others were hanged *in flagranti*, their executioners not requiring to wait for an order from the king or the judges, as has been seen by the passage in the preceding chapter, which we have copied from the articles of the compact entered into by the confederation.

Ximeno, then, revolved in his mind all these ideas, but the strange revelations of the captive were gradually putting them aside and substituting for them others of a more peaceful character, as the appearance of day gradually chases away the shadows of the night.

He was too young to harbour doubts or suspicions for any length of time. Ines was too beautiful not to be readily believed. Ximeno, therefore, no longer doubting the truth of her words, and the sincerity of her affection, which presented themselves in the magic drapery lent them by the unknown and mys-

terious character with which they were invested, became nearly spell-bound—was almost overcome.

If to love her is, perhaps, an irresistible law to all, reflected the youth, is it not a duty to me?—And this Rachel, this miserable creature, whose name was never uttered before me by my parents, although I have sometimes overheard it in their private conversations, what authority does she exercise over them? Who is that old woman, whose heart tells her, as mine tells me, that I was born for great things, in whom I inspire ideas as daring as those which I conceive myself?

It was impossible for Ximeno not to esteem a person who thus flattered the new sentiments of pride and ambition which had been suddenly awakened in his breast.

And appreciating and loving the protectress of the beautiful and enamoured maiden—we return to our theme—he was not far from loving her protégée.

Ines, meanwhile, regarded him with agreeable surprise, unable to understand why her words should have produced so profound an impression on her generous liberator.

Ximeno might have captivated the heart of the most coy and disdainful maiden, who had noted the imperious brevity of his words, the calmness and

decision of his gestures, his bravery, his gallantry, and above all, the contempt of life he manifested in his desire to liberate the fair prisoners of Sancho de Rota. No one ever braved death gallantly in the presence of a woman without receiving the meed of her admiration, but when death is affronted for the sake of the woman who beholds us, her love is the unfailing recompense.*

Nevertheless, nothing predisposed the maiden in behalf of Ximeno so powerfully as the agitation which she saw that the history of her adventures excited in his breast. That man of iron heart, so daring and inflexible, who had just slain the captain, in the midst of his little army, stood confused and abashed before his captive. What woman would not, in these circumstances, have been tempted to complete her triumph, to subjugate the new king of the Bârdenas, to convert the lion of the forest into a meek lamb, which should follow the uncertain footsteps of a capricious maiden.

Ines had to struggle against her fancied love for the nephew of the Jewess; but a fantastic affection must oppose to a real passion only such a resistance as the mist of the ocean presents to the vessel's prow.

* *Ti mannens mod är qvinnan kârt.—Tegner.*

After some minutes of significant silence, the youth asked, with the desire of hearing rather an excuse than an answer, "And did not Rachel reflect that the heart of Ximeno might have entertained a passion for another?"

"Rachel knew that her nephew's heart had remained free up to that time."

"But since then—ah! what changes may not the heart of man undergo in a month, a day, even an hour!"

"Are you his friend—are you his confidant?" replied Ines, painfully wounded by the first pang of jealousy.

As jealousy partakes so much of self-love, and self-love is the most sensitive passion in the human heart, it is not to be wondered at that the former should be the maiden's first sensation. But she then looked at the captain, and it seemed to her that, whatever might be the merits of Rachel's nephew, they could not surpass those of her deliverer;—or to speak more plainly, she thought the real superior to the imaginary Ximeno, and added immediately in a softened tone,—

"In truth, I think that the human heart is susceptible of sudden changes, and I think also that, if there is ground for accusation, on that account, there is also

ground for reproaching it for all its affections. You must not, therefore, hesitate in telling me if your friend is in love."

"What would you gain by knowing that?"

"As I have no claim upon him, and as I must renounce his heart, now that I am entirely deprived of my friend Rachel's support, I would be a gainer if I knew that he was happy, for that knowledge might diminish my own unhappiness."

"How generous, or how indifferent!" said Ximeno, internally, and almost stung with jealousy of himself; then addressing the captive he added, "Then you renounce the love of Ximeno?"

"I abandon my intention of visiting him."

"Why?"

"Because it is useless."

"Then where do you wish to go when you leave this?"

"The bird which has lost its parents and its nest, when once imprisoned in its cage, may, if set free, flutter about and enjoy its liberty for a moment, but it will soon gladly return and place itself within the wires of its prison."

"You would return, therefore, to my castle?" asked the youth, almost with tears in his eyes.

"Ah! who knows?"

"But did you not say—"

"But if the cage were abandoned by its master, what would become of the poor bird?"

"But will you ever want some one to care for you?"

"But if the kites penetrated into the cage while the little bird was flying at liberty, how could it return to its dwelling when it knows that it would become the victim of their rapacity?"

"No, no. I will scare away the evil disposed who would dare to touch the ground you tread on. I will be your shield, your defence, your friend," said the captain, with impassioned tenderness.

"No more, for heaven's sake; no more, for the bird is already fascinated, and if you call it with so agreeable a decoy, and direct at it another look, perhaps it may fall into the talons of the kite."

"Oh! no! you have come to my arms; it is providence that has led you. Rachel is an oracle. I was born for great deeds. I was born for you."

"Great God, who are you? who are you?" cried the maiden, with panting breath and broken accents
"Who are you that speak thus?"

"Ximeno, Ximeno! your heart has revealed it to you."

"Ximeno! He of Mendavia! such happiness is impossible."

"Look at me in your heart—look at me and say if I am not the same."

"Ximeno," repeated Ines, who saw united in that name the love of her imagination, and the love of her senses.

The two lovers remained long entwined in close embrace.

They then separated. Ines with face upturned, and radiant with joy; Ximeno with downcast forehead, and his heart torn with sudden pangs of remorse.

"Adieu, Ines," he said, as he descended the steep staircase of the castle.

"Adieu, Ximena," repeated the echo of his conscience.

That night, after liberating all the captives, except the most beautiful, the captain of the banditti sallied forth, and in order to smother his gloomy reflection, burnt down the castle of the Count de Lerin at Baigorri.

Amid the clouds of smoke that rose from the flames, the captain of the robbers fancied he saw outlined the

seductive forms of Ximena, who, with hands clasped in the attitude of prayer, gradually ascended to heaven, directing towards him soft and melancholy looks, which expressed tenderness and resignation rather than reproach.

Unhappy the man who attempts to efface the traces of an error with the footprints of crime !

CHAPTER V.

THE letter of the Constable Don Luis de Beaumont to the Count de Pallars, did not, in all probability, reach its destination, without a postscript regarding the carrying off of Doña Blanca, of Navarre. This may, at least, be supposed, although the chroniclers preserve an impenetrable silence on this and other points.

But the letter, like every thing else, which the Constable took in hand, arrived so opportunely in Catalonia, that, after peace had been already proclaimed with Don Juan II., king of Arragon and Navarre, and his son Don Ferdinand, afterwards surnamed the Catholic, had been sworn Prince of Gerona, sinister reports were beginning to circulate regarding the premature and sudden death of the amiable prince of Viana.

Notwithstanding the unconquerable aversion with which the Catalans regarded Don Juan, and still more his second and execrable consort, the step-mother

of Don Carlos and Doña Blanca, these rumours were confined to dark whispers of suspected poisoning, and were only heard from the lips of the most daring and rebellious. But Count de Pallars took care to give them substance, now letting drop half-words and mysterious phrases, now exhibiting with the utmost precaution documents of the most secret nature, with the sole view of making them public, openly convincing the most obstinate, shrugging his shoulders with the credulous and excited, answering one with a slight but significant smile, and another with a pressure of the hand, replying with exclamations to some, and vows and protestations to others; in short, he went to work so effectually that, in a very short time, the whisper was gradually converted into a rumour, a noise, an outcry, and at length a tempest and whirlwind of generous indignation, which boiled in the bosoms of the Catalans, and then bursting forth in Roussillon, swept through the whole principality as the thunders roll from one confine of the horizon to the other.

And as if the disastrous death of that much-loved prince were not of itself sufficient to produce an uncontrollable outburst of popular rage, the Count de Pallars added fresh fuel to the blaze by dexterously turning to account the disappearance of

Doña Blanca of Navarre, towards whom all the partisans of her brother were turning their eyes, without even being able to catch a glimpse of her.

Where was the princess? Who knew anything about her? Was she really alive? Did the hand which administered the poison to the prince Don Carlos wither after the perpetration of that crime? Were not a few drops from the poisoned chalice reserved for his sister? If the possession of lawful claims to the throne was the sole crime of Juan the Second's first-born, might not she, who inherited his rights, have also shared his disastrous end? If it was the design of the king to satisfy the immeasurable ambition of his children by his second marriage, was it not absolutely necessary to get rid of Doña Blanca as he had got rid of Don Carlos?

These reflections, unhappily too logical, excited the imaginations of the Catalans to such a degree that it was believed in a positive manner by all, that the spirits of the prince and princess roamed nightly through the streets of Barcelona, trailing long winding sheets, and calling for vengeance in deep and awful tones.

Even in the retirement of the domestic circle, there were many who asserted that they had heard at the dead of night inarticulate groans, and broken sighs,

which seemed to proceed from the next room, and when it was entered, appeared to come from that which was just left ; some there were who averred that they had seen two doves hovering in the air together, with blood-stained breast, and two small phosphoric lights ascending to the firmament from the palace of the ancient Counts of Barcelona, and emitting a pale and lugubrious splendour.

The sagacious Count de Pallars, availing himself of the public excitement, was enabled in a few days to assemble a numerous army, and as the queen of Don Juan resolved to go forth herself to meet him, with her son Prince Ferdinand, and with that view took up her head-quarters in Gerona, the count fell suddenly on that city, besieging it with the firm purpose of obtaining possession at all hazards of the detested stepmother.

In the mean time the Count de Lerin was bestirring himself with the same object in Navarre, aided by the Castilians, with whom he was intriguing ; but Don Juan, who had received a large sum of money from Louis the Eleventh, King of France, was enabled to levy troops, and place them under the command of Gaston de Foix, his son-in-law.

This army had to cross the Bârdenas in order to go

from Navarre into Arragon, and thence into Catalonia, and in those rugged mountains it might encounter no small difficulties if the brigands should take it into their heads to place themselves in a defile in order to prevent its passage.

There was no great fear that this should occur ; for a considerable time these outlaws manifested a certain predilection for the lives and property of those who belonged to the Count de Lerin's party, so that they might almost be regarded as friends. But as those who were besieged in Gerona were so urgent in demanding succours from Navarre, it was necessary to hasten the march of the auxiliary forces, as well as prudent not to run any risk from the caprice of the captain of the robbers, who might have been gained by the Constable's bribes.

The King of Navarre, therefore, sent messengers to Ximeno, offering to leave him unmolested for six months provided he allowed the troops to pass without any opposition ; and the captain of the banditti, who after a few days of useless searching and fruitless crimes committed for the purpose of discovering his Ximena, had become tired of hearing around him the groans and lamentations uttered by the victims of his vengeance, not only willingly accepted the proposal of the monarch, but divesting himself of the prerogatives

of king of those forests, submitted to Don Juan with his whole band, under the sole condition of receiving a commission as captain of mercenaries, a species of migratory soldiers who stood at that period in the same relation to robbers that privateers do at the present day to pirates.

It is not difficult to divine what reception the monarch would give to this proposition, which not only secured the neutrality, but gained the friendship of a hundred tigers, the terror of those woods. He granted to them therefore a liberal pay, besides allowing them all the booty which they might gain from the enemy, and with these securities, he gave orders that the army of Don Gaston de Foix should advance and penetrate into the dreaded territory of the Bârdenas.

When the news was spread abroad it was received in the neighbouring towns with unequivocal demonstrations of joy, and from that moment the banditti passed through the towns which were subject to the royalist party, without being preceded by terror, accompanied by crime, or followed by desolation.

The submission of the outlaws was a severe blow to the Beaumontese party, and the Count de Lerin, therefore, with Machiavelian astuteness, tried at least

to make it ephemeral, and even attempted to place the captain of the Free Companions for ever at enmity with the King of Navarre, by putting the following stratagem in execution.

A party of daring Beamontese soldiers, disguised in the fantastic parti-coloured dresses and incomplete armour of the robbers, who could not be said to wear a uniform, placed themselves by the count's orders in one of the passes of the Bârdenas, on the evening of the day that the royal troops were winding through the defile; and discharging arrows and javelins on the rear guard, fell upon it after having thrown it into confusion, in order that the Count de Foix should suppose that the outlaws had broken faith with him, and, dispersing his troops through the mountains, should take vengeance on them.

This plan of the Constable was only too successful. The son of the Count de Foix, who like his father and many of his ancestors bore the name of Gaston, was marching in the rear guard of the army, too carelessly not to fall into the ambuscade, where he would have perished in the midst of the Count de Lerin's myrmidons, unless a formidable warrior had suddenly come to his assistance at the moment when it was most needed.

Gaston was then entering, a beardless and inexperienced youth, on his first campaign, and in his

eagerness to signalize his valour he found himself quickly beset, at the foot of a rock, by four of the Beamontese soldiers, who pitilessly discharged a tremendous shower of blows on his armour, by which it would have been hewn in pieces but for its fine temper. At the first onset his horse fell dead at his feet, and thus became a hindrance to his defence ; and even if the youth were in a condition to betake himself to flight, to which, however, he would have preferred the loss of a hundred lives, that ignominious resource was utterly beyond his power, for a precipitous rock rose behind him to a great height. In this extremity the captain of the freebooters arrived with some of his men.

Ximeno, in order to inure himself to the heavy weight of armour, ordered a complete suit to be made for himself, which he never laid aside, even during moments of ease and relaxation ; and as his profound and habitual sadness made him shy and reserved, even among his comrades, he rarely raised the visor of his helmet. He could therefore enter into the combat without any disadvantage. The captain was indignant at the deception practised by the Count de Lerin ; and, anxious to wash away the stain which had for a moment fallen on his name, he furiously attacked the Beamontese, and overthrowing some, crushing others, smiting and terrifying the rest, he opened a path

for himself, with the point of his lance, to the foot of the rock, where the heir of the house of Foix, and grandson of Don Juan II., remained in such peril.

The Beamontese knowing the importance of such a prize, had formed a circle around him to prevent his escape ; but seeing the terrible captain of the mercenaries upon them, whom they recognized by the device on his shield, and still more by the prowess of his arm, turned their weapons against him, abandoning the beardless youth, who now, almost exhausted, was making but feeble efforts to defend himself.

Ximeno spread terror and death around him.

“Cowards!” he shouted to the enemy. “Traitors who can only be bold under the disguise of the brave ; receive now the due reward of your deceit. Take this, traitor, you that have nothing honorable about you but the dress. And you, old fox, whom I know by the smell, take that, and go where you shall have to don the devil’s uniform.”

Thus Ximeno, like the heroes of Homer, like all warriors, in fact, who are least removed from nature, and who cannot comprehend those combats without animosity, those cold and measured struggles in which we now see myriads of men engaged—Ximeno, we repeat, during the *melée* insulted his antagonists, who were at length obliged to retreat.

The son of Count de Foix, free from all danger, miraculously saved by the valiant captain, threw himself into his arms, expressing to him the fervour of his gratitude; but Ximeno who, while the enemy were retiring, remained on horseback, with the reins slackened, his lance resting on the earth, his forehead bent, and his whole body indicating langour, was scarcely touched by Don Gaston, who eagerly desired to press him to his bosom, when he fell voiceless and senseless into his arms.

Blood was seen flowing from between his cuirass and gorget, and a slight indentation in that part of his armour, shewed that the point of a lance had penetrated there.

The youthful Gaston de Foix, like all gallant men at his age, had a warm and excitable heart, prone to sudden and violent affections, carrying love as well as hatred to extremes.

He felt, therefore, very keenly, the mishap of his deliverer, and vowed to him there, in the sincerity of his heart, a gratitude and friendship which should last as long as life, if that of the captain were not already sacrificed as a holocaust for his own.

The count, Don Gaston, informed of the events which occurred behind him, turned and joined the rear-guard soon after the affray was terminated; and

his son expressed to him the most ardent desire to remain in Navarre, in order to assist his deliverer, the captain of the mercenaries, who was dangerously wounded on his account.

There was no help for it ; the youth had an energetic will, and above all, an impassioned soul, and his wish was granted.

The count pursued his march, in order to succour his friends at Gerona ; and his son accompanied Ximeno, who was carried in a litter to the famous monastery of Oliva.

The point of the lance had pierced his throat ; the wound was dangerous, but not mortal.

When the captain of the Free Companions opened his eyes to the light, he saw beside him a handsome and sympathising youth, who kissed his now ungauntleted hands, with a countenance expressive of interest and affection. That youth was a prince, nephew to the king, and presumptive heir to the crown of Navarre, if, as some supposed, the princess Doña Blanca was dead ; but did not the restless eyes of Ximeno look for some other object around his sick bed ?

Oh ! how deeply imprinted on his memory was the image of one lovely form ! What pangs did not his conscience inflict at the recollection—pangs far more poignant than those of his wound.

His eyes, perchance, sought Ines? No! the heart of Ximeno did not belong to Ines for more than a single hour. The heart of Ximeno belonged to Ines as the dove does to the bird of prey which has the power of fascinating it; a moment passes, and then, either the dove has perished, or it hides itself within its nest, in terror of the fatal bird that held it spell-bound with its eye. Ines was mistress of the heart of Ximeno, as the magnetiser is master of the sensations of the magnetised; when the fluid which forms the medium of communication vanishes, the relation between the two persons no longer exists.

Ximena, yes, Ximena, the princess of Viana, Doña Blanca of Navarre, that unhappy woman from whom he was severing himself more and more by his engagements, by his connexions, by his friendships; and of whom he became more and more deeply enamoured the more he widened the gulf of separation—she it was that the eyes of the captain longed to see, when life, which was for a long time suspended, returned to animate his countenance.

Ximeno had scared away the unfortunate Ines with his brusque indifference—had frightened the bird away from its cage; and it would seem as if his destiny strove to divert his course further from the princess the more he was impelled to love her.

But we did not intend to occupy ourselves in this chapter with love affairs, and we shall not depart any further from our design. We shall, nevertheless, transfer to our pages, by way of conclusion, what is written in reference to this subject in the manuscript of the friar of Irache, who, in explaining this as well as other historical points, always persists in his theory of enchantments.

“ This inordinate affection,” he says, “ appears to us a matter of witchcraft, although it does not belong to us to speak of such mundane affairs; we shall therefore rest satisfied with stating that Ximeno must have been under the influence of sorcery to love the fair pèasant so desperately.”

CHAPTER VI.

ON a winter evening, in the year 1464, two horsemen were pursuing their journey, with less speed than they desired, from the interior of Navarre to the capital of the principality of Bearne, along a narrow and rugged path on the northern skirts of the Pyrenees.

The first was mounted on a very spirited charger, which was, however, obliged in spite of itself, to repress all display of its mettle, from the difficulties of the path, which consisted most frequently of the naked rock, and in some places was ploughed by the dried-up channels of former torrents ; while in many parts it was encumbered by the gigantic trunks of wide-branching beeches and lofty pines, which had been overthrown by the tempest.

He was armed *cap-à-pié*, with the shaft of his lance resting in its bucket, and secured to his right arm by a strap, while with the left he held a shield of tempered steel, on which was painted a blood-hound

with its snout to the ground in the act of following the scent, and with these words round the border, "Until I find her."

The second rode a sorrel nag, which, with the lightness and agility of a goat, and with a serenity which only accompanies advanced age, leaped from rock to rock, and from precipice to precipice, doubtless from the long habit of travelling in mountainous regions. Its rider was a man of about forty years, robust and ruddy, with a bushy and bristling black beard, and eyes also dark, but small and jocund. He wore an iron skull-cap, a leathern shield and cuirass, and an enormous sword, which the artificer must have elongated half a yard in order to make it as tall as its wearer.

After travelling for a considerable space without applying the spur, but holding the reins tight to keep up their horses, which made genuflexions at every step, and often went so far as to kiss the ground, the travellers were about to quicken their speed on coming to a plain about a league from Orthez, when the first suddenly reined in his horse, and raising his visor, said, as he turned round to his companion, who always kept at a respectful distance—

"Marin."

Marin was regaling himself at the time with the

nectarious juice contained in a large leathern bottle, which usually hung from his saddle-bow, and which he was often wont to remove in order to bring it in contact with his thirsting lips. He was obliged, therefore, to suspend his caresses in the midst of this supreme enjoyment.

"Chafarote," cried the foremost cavalier again, with impatience.

"Sir."

"What is the meaning of this? why do you lag behind?"

"Ha!" answered the good Marin, doubtless called Chafarote* by way of antithesis, while he again hung his wine-skin in its place. "No, sir, but I cannot keep up with you. This Bavioca,† devil take him, is only good for clambering among rocks, for when he comes upon level ground he loses all his mettle."

"Hark, Marin, do you not hear, in the direction of St. Jean de Pied le Port, the jingling of bells and the trampling of horses?"

"Your worship must have the jingling in your head, for I don't hear a syllable, for my part."

"Nevertheless, whether I have it in my head or not," answered the cavalier, who was doubtless

* Chafarote is a kind of short sword.

† The name of the Cid's charger.

accustomed to the jocularities of Marin, "I hear the noise more clearly and distinctly every minute, and we must ascertain whence it proceeds."

"Master, master, you are right; these must be sumpter mules laden with treasure for the King of France, who is said to be between San Juan de Luz and Fontarabia, endeavouring to negotiate a peace. Ah, sir! this would have been a famous opportunity, if we were still in the pine forests of the Bârdenas, for laying hands on this tribute by way of luncheon."

Scarcely had the worthy Chafarote time to finish the last phrase when the cavalier, drawing back his right arm, disengaging it from the strap, and raising the shaft of his lance, discharged a tremendous blow on the shoulders of his squire, which, unless the latter had succeeded in protecting himself partially with his shield, would doubtless have prevented him from returning for a while to the embrace of his much-loved wine-skin.

"Knavel!" exclaimed the cavalier, his voice quivering with rage; "have you and your comrades not yet come to understand that you are not under the orders of a bandit, but in the pay of a captain in the service of the king?"

Chafarote buried his head between his shoulders,

doubled himself over the saddle-bow, drew up his legs, and, if he had known mathematics, would have tried at that moment to reduce himself to the smallest possible expression.

Knowing the irascible disposition and promptitude of his master, he took good care not to make any reply ; but now, perceiving that the sound of the bells and the trampling of the cavalcade were evidently approaching, he said to him, with humble voice and contrite demeanour,

“Would your worship wish me to go a little in advance, and see if it is some party of Beamontese rebels who have sworn to make mince-meat of us should we fall into their hands ?”

“No, let us halt in this plain, where it would be a disgrace to take any other precaution than putting our lances in rest : if they are enemies, it is well that we should not have them at our backs ; and if friends, it is right that we should bear one another company.”

“And may I ask what is our road, for hang it if I can understand what I am about since I ceased to belong to the guild of freebooters, in order to enlist as squire in your service.”

“Do you regret your former life ?”

“Alas ! master,” answered Chafarote with a piteous

sigh, "I confess that I have a certain inclination for it. Drinking and robbing are my ——"

"Chafarote!"

"Enough, sir; let bygones be bygones. I shall be contented with dedicating to the former all the affection which I professed for the latter."

"When would you have had the honour of making such a journey as that in which we are now engaged, if you had remained in that anxious, wretched way of life which the bandit leads?"

"The journey, the journey! Sir, that is my text; where are we going to?"

"To Orthez."

"To the marriage perchance?" asked the squire ironically.

"Do not laugh, insolent dog. It is to the marriage."

"To the marriage of the prince?"

"Yes, dullard, yes! Do you doubt my word?"

"No, no, sir!" Chafarote hastened to reply; "I never doubt what your worship says, especially when you bear at your side a lance which, like the arm of Providence, reaches everywhere. But let us understand one another; do we go invited?"

"Invited, man! yes, invited by the Count and Countess de Foix themselves, the Prince and Princess

of Bearne, and son-in-law and daughter of King Juan, who have sent me a polite message that I must not fail to be present at the marriage of their eldest son, Don Gaston de Foix, with Madeleine of France, sister of King Louis XI."

"I confess, sir," answered the amazed Chafarote, "that it would never have occurred to me in former times to present myself at such exalted festivities unless for the purpose of making a clean sweep of the plate. By the soul of my grandmother, I shall feed like a fighting-cock! But how comes it that these great people should think of me, except for the purpose of having me hanged?" added Marin, using the singular instead of the plural pronoun, doubtless from respect to his master or fear of his lance.

"The bridegroom, Don Gaston de Foix, is my best, my only friend; and, although he is a royal and illustrious prince, he does not think it unworthy of himself to have me at his side. But a truce to questions, and direct your eyes to that group of people who are coming in sight yonder, where the sun is just going down."

Marin, as desired, turned his head towards the west, and descried on the top of a rising ground, not far off, four horsemen in complete armour; and

in the midst of them a litter, borne by two sturdy mules, whose heads were hung with bells, crowned with gay plumes, and adorned with ribbons and rosettes of the finest wool and a thousand colours. Beside the animals were also two stalwart peasants of the district.

It might be doubted whether these horsemen were a guard of honour to the person probably inclosed in the litter, or ruthless ruffians escorting an unwilling captive.

This doubt might be easily cleared up, for one of the escort proceeded a considerable distance in advance, on observing the resolute demeanour of those who awaited the cavalcade with lance in rest.

The country could not be in a very settled and peaceful state, when our wayfarers, bound for a marriage feast, took such precautions, with armour both offensive and defensive, and felt such mistrust at the approach of human beings.

The king, Don Juan, confident in his own resources, or perhaps in his good fortune, was not dismayed when enemies, both numerous and terrible, sprang up simultaneously throughout his extensive dominions. His son-in-law, Don Gaston de Foix, aided by the principal cavaliers of the Agramontese faction, Mosen Pierres de Peralta, the famous

Sancho de Erviti, with both of whom we became acquainted at the rape of the princess, Sancho Londono, and Beltran de Armendariz, forced the Count de Pallars to raise the siege of Gerona, where the queen and her son Ferdinand were fearfully hard pressed. But the Catalans, who were not discouraged by this check, nor by a subsequent defeat, declared the King of Arragon and Navarre a traitor and enemy to his country; and, as they were ignorant, not only of the abode, but even the existence of Doña Blanca, the legitimate possessor of the rights of her father, in his default, they went to offer the three states of the principality of Catalonia to the King of Castile, from hatred to Juan the Second, who styled himself Count of Barcelona.

We might indulge in a variety of comments on this notable fact in our history, if we were to examine it under a constitutional point of view, but, leaving them for a more convenient opportunity, we shall merely state, that the King of Castile at first accepted the proposal of the Catalans, and, that afterwards, as the project appeared to him altogether visionary, according to the chronicle, he answered that he only wished to be the medium of effecting a solid peace, if they agreed to leave their differences with the King of Arragon, to the arbitrement of Louis the Eleventh,

King of France, who was engaged in maturing a scheme of matrimonial alliance between his sister Madeleine and the presumptive heir to the throne of Pampeluna.

The Catalans incautiously acceded to the proposal, not knowing that they were like a flock of sheep intrusting themselves to the guardianship and decision of the wolf; and they honestly laid down their arms, while the arbiter was preparing the publication of his sentence.

Widely different from this was the conduct of the Beamontese faction in Navarre. The Count de Lerin, their captain, was too wary and astute to let himself be so easily deceived by appearances of justice and impartiality; and, although alone, and deprived of the support of his Catalonian friends, he continued to carry on in Navarre a warfare which, if not so formal and ostentatious as that of the principality, was certainly more successful, considering the scanty forces at his disposal, after he had sent a portion of his troops to Catalonia, for the purpose of assisting the Count de Pallars.

Thus then have we explained the just motives for suspicion and distrust which influenced our travellers, who placed themselves on their guard against hostile guerillas, which, although they did not infest

Bearne as they did Navarre, might nevertheless have crossed the frontier.

"Who goes there?" cried the approaching cavalier, with a hoarse voice, to the two expectants.

"Navarre for Agramont," answered him another voice, not less powerful, but more sonorous.

"Oh! we are friends;" returned he of the escort, "and if the fame of your gallantry, and the device on your shield speak truth, you are the most valiant captain of Free Lances that Navarre can boast of."

"The captain of the Bârdenas," replied Ximeno, modestly.

"My name is Sancho de Erviti," answered the new comer, raising his visor.

"Sancho!"

"Yes; do you dislike the name?"

"I don't deny but I do."

"Perhaps you supposed that I was engaged—away yonder—in the mountains of Catalonia; but, friend, the truce has driven me from that quarter;—I stagnate when there is no war."

"Sancho! Sancho!—of what?" demanded Ximeno, as if struck by an idea.

"Sancho de Erviti.—Zounds! it looks as if you heard the name of one of the nobles of Navarre for the first time," said the cavalier, somewhat piqued

that his illustrious fame should not have reached the ears of the captain.

"Sancho!" repeated the latter, "I know not why I have such a fancy for that name."

"I vow to Satan, there are plenty of Sanchos in the world."

"There were many more," replied Ximeno, with a strange smile, "there were many more, before I first grasped my lance."

"Ha! you have dispatched, then, a goodly number to the other world?"

"Oh, a rare lot!—and who knows, if they did not all deserve their fate?"

"But, my friend, let not this strange mania affect you towards me."

"Towards you! and why?"

"Let us proceed, if you please," said the cavalier, pretending not to hear the question, on seeing that those who accompanied the litter were approaching too near.

"Whither do you go?"

"Along this road."

"I am going the same way," answered Ximeno.
"And do you stop at——?"

"At some place."

"Like myself—exactly. At some place."

"Well, then, let us proceed," said Sancho, with evident symptoms of impatience, and even of annoyance at this rencontre.

"Let us go. But who the deuce do you carry in this litter, Don Sancho?"

"Nobody—an archbishop," then added Sancho de Erviti, suddenly, and with much mystery.

"Zounds! Do you say that an archbishop is nobody?"

"Well, he is as much an archbishop as he of Tarra-gona," replied Sancho, earnestly maintaining what no one contradicted.

"I believe it; but stop. Do you know, Don Sancho, that I hear sighs and groans which pierce my heart?"

"Idle fancies. Let us proceed at a brisk pace, it is getting infernally cold, and the night is setting in."

"But deuce take me if your archbishop does not sigh like a nun."

Sancho turned pale, and in order doubtless to conceal his agitation, he let down his visor, saying—

"On my soul it is an archbishop."

"So it may appear to you," answered Ximeno calmly; "but is it not possible that you may have

got the wrong sow by the ear? and what you suppose to be an archbishop, may turn out to be a poor devil of a chorister."

"Captain," exclaimed the cavalier, "I maintain my word, or it would be the first time that Sancho de Erviti failed to keep his ground against the whole world!"

At this moment was heard a female voice, which issued from the litter, with a piteous accent that might have moved the rocks to compassion, ejaculating,—"Alas! how wretched am I!"

"Do you know, Don Sancho," observed the captain, "that I was about to ask your archbishop to come out and pronounce his benediction on this place."

"Why?"

"Because I imagine that a soul in pain must be wandering about here."

"You are opinionative, captain, but you have met with a last that will fit your shoe. I am just the man to make obstinacy a matter of vanity, because I have valour more than enough when my reasons run short."

"In fact, noble sir," answered Ximeno, in a tone of suppressed fury—"seeing that you are called Sancho, I think you dispute too much."

"What do you mean?—But—let us proceed."

"Let us go then, as soon as you please."

"What were you going to say?"

"I was saying that I am glad at having at length met with a *Sancho who is brave, and disputes much*."

"It is my turn of mind; and as I cannot control myself, I have made a boast of my defect: observe—observe the motto on my shield."

"What does it mean?"

"Cannot you read?"

"No."

"Nor I neither; but I know, because all that can read tell me so, that there is written here 'A nay for a yea;' which signifies, that when others affirm anything I deny it, and when others deny I affirm."*

"Do you know, cavalier, that I have thrown away my prowess on many Sanchos in this world, in searching for a Sancho like you? Do you know that a Sancho de Rota died, solely because he bore some resemblance to one *Sancho de Erriti*?"

"What does this mean?" said the latter, reining in his horse.

"Let us proceed, let us proceed—now it is my turn to urge you forward."

* Historical.

“ But that tone,—those words.”

“ Forward. I wish you to satisfy one of my doubts. When are you going to commit some piece of villainy—I mean—some scoundrelism worthy of a noble cavalier,—When, for example, are you going to carry off damsels—at Mendavia?”

“ Heavens!”

“ Do you mean to wear that device, or would you prefer disguising yourself in the armour of your squire, that you may not be recognized?”

“ Well, captain, I see that you know it all, and in the name of the king—”

“ Sir knight, shouted the captain, with the voice of a torrent bursting its banks and rushing headlong down a precipice, what I don’t know I can guess, and in God’s name I ask you to tell me what you have done with Ximena, the peasant damsel of Mendavia, or you have to face, me in single combat.”

“ Let us pass, let us pass in the king’s name, and I swear I shall come to-morrow to this place and chastise your insolence,” was the answer of the ireful Sancho.

“ Sancho de Erviti, look at my shield—*Until I find her*;—my heart tells me that I have now found her.”

The captain suddenly wheeled round, and putting

spurs to his horse, dashed rapidly forward to the litter."

"Have pity on me, cavalier," cried a voice within half choked with sobs.

Sancho followed Ximeno.

"Forward! forward!" he shouted, goading the mules with the point of his lance.

But the captain placed himself in the middle of the road, with his lance in rest, and with firm accent and resolute bearing, said to him :—

"Who is this lady that you are leading captive!"

"You are very anxious to know, are you not?" returned Sancho de Erviti.

"Yes."

"That is to say, captain, that you will have me declare it to you by force."

"Yes, I say," replied the captain impatiently.

"Well then, captain of thieves, seeing you are so determined on the matter, I say, No!"

"You shall not move a single step farther, unless you set her at liberty, whoever she may be."

"How! do you suppose, miserable outlaw, that you can hinder me?" replied Don Sancho de Erviti, making a furious onset at his antagonist, who received him with gallant bearing.

Then began an unequal and bloody contest.

Chafarote, baring his formidable sword, placed himself at the side of his master, who engaged both Sancho de Erviti and his page, and would doubtless have been surrounded by the other four who composed the escort, but for this assistance. At the first encounter both lances coming into collision with their shields, flew into shivers : the cavaliers then with one accord drew their swords, and dealt one another a continued shower of tremendous strokes, which resounded on their armour like forge-hammers thundering on the anvil. At length the helmet of Don Sancho gave way under a two-handed blow, and another directed at his head, which happened to swerve to one side, made him reel in his saddle and then fall to the earth with a tremendous crash, like that of a secular oak struck down by a thunderbolt.

The captain's horse at the same time doubled his knees, and shedding a stream of blood from his head, closed his eyes for ever, after fixing a melancholy gaze on his rider.

On looking around him Ximeno saw three warriors stretched on the earth,—Sancho and one of the squires of the escort, together with the luckless Marin, whose aid had proved so efficacious to him. The litter, the peasants and two horsemen, had con-

tinued their journey, hastening as fast as they could from the scene of the encounter.

The captain did not even take time to render assistance to his squire. Mounting the horse of Sancho de Erviti, he buried his spurs in its flanks, and in a few minutes overtook the litter.

The two squires who had survived the combat, and who, by the order of their master, continued to escort it, quickening the pace of the animals, fled in consternation as soon as they saw the formidable captain of the Free Lances approach. He alighted, and holding the bridle of his horse with one hand, seized in great agitation with the other the handle of the litter door. His heart throbbed violently; he had the confident hope of seeing his lost Ximena.

He opened it at length, and she who was within turned out to be a nun of the order of Saint Benedict.

"Señora," said the cavalier, with respectful but saddened accent, "you are free; tell me where you wish to be taken, and I shall accompany you till you are placed in safety, were it to the end of the world."

The nun enveloped in the sacred veil made no answer.

“Madam,” he said, again, “fear nothing, I am your deliverer.”

Still the same silence.

The captain, perceiving that she remained motionless, and observing the extreme paleness of her hands, determined to raise her veil to see if she was in a swoon. He performed this operation at first with respectful timidity; but seeing that there was no opposition, he threw the veil at once over the shoulders of the unconscious princess.

A universal tremor paralysed Ximeno's tongue. He immediately lifted his hand to his visor in order to raise it, fancying doubtless that its bars, obscuring his vision, prevented him from seeing the reality. He rubbed his eyes as if awakening from a dream, his bosom heaved beneath his iron cuirass, his heart throbbed violently.

“It is she! there is no doubt, it is she!” exclaimed the captain, with deep and quivering accents, and then with an exclamation of unutterable joy:

“Ximena!” he repeated, “my Ximena!”

The echo of his voice was so strong and piercing that it could not fail to reach the heart of the princess, who, gradually opening her eyes, and looking around her with astonishment, fastened her wondering gaze

on the countenance of the youth who was regarding her with unspeakable rapture, and then burst forth into broken exclamations :

“ Ah ! What is this ? Where am I ? ’Tis he—yes—’tis he—Ximeno ! Ximeno ! ” and threw herself in his arms.

CHAPTER VII.

HERE we hoped to find in the chronicle a glowing, minute, and circumstantial description of the sensations which the two lovers must have felt after so long an absence and such cruel uncertainty ; but the historians, whether from indolence or ignorance, content themselves with simply telling us that they are unable to describe the tumult of feelings and ideas which must have taken possession of the hearts and minds of the lovers aforesaid. The chroniclers leave the matter to the discernment and good sense of their readers ; and we should certainly have been left in a fine pass if they had done the same with the rest of the history.

Nevertheless, it is remarked by an historiographer, that the recollection of the captain's first and only fault in allowing himself to be captivated for a moment by Ines somewhat disturbed his present joy, and gave to his countenance a less satisfied, happy and

unembarrassed expression than that which lighted up the features of the princess, who could exhibit her inmost soul, as pure and spotless as the driven snow.

The evil is that the chronicler above referred to takes occasion from this to moralise in a prosing manner on the text of "how good a thing it is to be always good;" as if the author, however holy he might be, when placed in the same circumstances as the captain of the freebooters—But let us pursue our story, for it seems to us that our readers would have more pleasure in listening to the lovers than to all the chroniclers in the world.

The captain was the first to recover from the extatic silence which reigned for some time.

"But what is this, Ximena? You in the dress of a nun! Have I indeed delivered you from one species of captivity only to discover that you are doomed to live in another?"

Blanca, instead of replying to this question, not less astonished than her deliverer, addressed to him the following:

"And you, Ximeno, what a strange change have you undergone! I really cannot credit the evidence of my senses. It appears to me absolutely impossible, that the valiant warrior who has just rescued me from twice the number of opponents, can be the

timid youth who used to bear me company in my cabin at Mendavia !”

“Not more impossible than that you, a simple peasant, the guest of peasants on the banks of the Ebro, should travel escorted by so many cavaliers, and in a litter worthy of bearing the Queen of Navarre. What transformation is this?”

“It looks, in fact, Ximeno, as if we were still under the influence of a dream, from which I would never desire to awake. Only to think that I am free from my persecutors, that I am mistress of myself, of my words, of my actions, that I am placed in safety by a man who loves me for what I appear to him to be, and not for what I have derived from others——”

“Yes,” interrupted the captain, and his forehead gradually darkened with that sad cloud of memories, the only one which obscured the bright and serene atmosphere of present happiness; “Yes! you have perceived it at last. I love you, and have loved you from the first moment my eyes beheld you. This love, like a celestial ray, enlightened my understanding, opened the eyes of my soul to the faith, and in order to identify myself with you, I wished that our prayers should be addressed to the same God, and that if we could not be united on earth, we should

at least have the same abode in heaven. When amidst adventures so strange and incredible, you disappeared from my eyes, at the very moment that I had rescued you from a disastrous death, my eyes were deprived of light, my heart of life and happiness, and repose forsook my soul. Then I experienced a transformation, a sudden change in my whole being; I felt myself bold and valiant; I resolved to seek you everywhere, to wrest the prey from the talons of the spoiler; but, alas! I did not imagine that after two years of struggling and strife, you should be restored to my eyes covered with a veil—surrounded by an insuperable barrier to my happiness.”

The princess smiled sadly on hearing these last expressions. It is true that her forehead was girt with the sacred veil of the virgins of the Lord; but that obstacle was perhaps the least of those which stood between the heir, or, to speak more correctly, the legitimate mistress of the throne of Navarre, and the son of Samuel, the Jew of Mendavia.

Such nevertheless was the sweet melancholy, the burning passion, displayed in the looks of Ximeno—so little accustomed was Doña Blanca to the language of sincere and tender affection—that, intoxicated in spite of herself with that delicious perfume, as well as with the magic tones of his voice, she could not

summon courage enough to leave him in the belief that the habit she wore enchained her heart, and still less to reveal to him the elevation of her birth, the abyss which separated them ; to pronounce, in short, a word which would have for ever confounded and annihilated her lover.

After a short pause, she said to him, with tremulous voice and blushing countenance, "Ximeno, it is by compulsion that I wear this dress ; I am free, thanks to your valour—entirely free ; my lips have never uttered any vows which can fetter my actions."

"Enough, enough," replied the captain, whose conscience was lulled into sleep by the soft music of that voice, "I cannot aspire to your love ; the eagerness which your enemies exhibit in persecuting you ; the pomp with which I see you surrounded ; even your distinguished port, which seems to proclaim you a queen—all this forces upon me the conviction that you are not what you appeared to be at Mendavia. Then I was a youth without experience, and deprived even of the faculty of thinking, because my whole soul was absorbed in feeling, but during the last two years I have reflected much, because I suffered more. You must be at least the daughter of some gentleman,

and nobly born, for cavaliers escort you, and even deign to carry you away captive ; it is impossible that you can harbour any affection toward the son of a Jew, who knows not if at this moment he is not committing an indiscretion in talking to you as he did in the arbour of your hut—as he did to the gentle peasant of Mendavia.”

“No, no, proceed,” exclaimed the princess, carried away irresistibly by the sweet allurements of Ximeno’s soft and captivating tones ; “treat me as your equal ; at one time I owe you my life and at another my liberty : the nobility of your soul more than supplies any defect of birth.”

“Well, then,” he answered, as if encouraged by a vague hope, “perhaps, as I have said, you are the daughter of some man of rank, in which case I, a poor reptile that crawls along the ground you tread, shall have no higher ambition, no greater pleasure than to attend you as a dog follows his master, and give my life to defend you ; but I shall at least be able to raise to you my eyes ; I shall be able to think of you without any offence to God, which I could not have done if you were consecrated to his service. Now, tell me where you wish to be conducted, for the

night approaches, and we must think of taking shelter."

"But in what country are we? Where were they taking me to?"

"What! do you not know it? In the Pyrenees," answered the captain, in amazement.

"Last night I was taken out of the convent of St. Jean de Pied le Port, with the sanction of the abbess, by four cavaliers encased in iron from head to foot; they shut me up in this litter, treating me with respect, but with incredible severity, and carried me along without stopping in any town through which we passed, and in the country only such time as was absolutely necessary for refreshment to ourselves as well as to the mules and horses. They have dragged me through these mountains without heeding my tears and entreaties, which utterly failed to soften the stony hearts of my ravishers, who never once raised the visor of their helmets before me, nor deigned to answer a single word to my reiterated supplications."

"This is all very strange; but we must not tarry any longer here. The sun has just gone down, and we must look for some place where we can pass the night. Fortunately I have a friend not far from

here, under whose roof you will be perfectly safe ; then you will relate to me your adventures, and I also shall reserve till we are housed the communication of mine."

"Meanwhile," answered the princess, "I will meditate on the course which it becomes me to pursue in these circumstances."

And, after directing an ardent gaze at the princess, the captain, whose countenance betrayed a mixture of exultation and melancholy, closed the door of the litter, and said to the peasants who accompanied it—"Forward, lads ; we must reach Orthez before the night closes in."

The peasants looked at him with an expression of wonderment, not unmixed with malice.

"Forward to Orthez with all due speed. Don't you understand ?" repeated Ximeno.

"Yes, master ; we understood it was to Orthez," answered the guides.

And shrugging their shoulders, with a boorish smile, they said to one another—

"Caramba, Juancho ! Surely there was no need for that to dispatch two men to the other world."

"The devil take me, friend Francho, if I can under-

stand it ; but we have only to obey and hold our tongues."

And looking askance at the litter, as well as the captain, they continued their journey.

Ximeno radiant with delight, and absorbed in his amorous reflections, neither heard these remarks, nor observed the malicious smile of the rustics.

CHAPTER VIII.

AMIDST the obscurity of the night, faintly lighted up by the mild beams of the moon, which were occasionally bedimmed by fleecy clouds sailing along the sky, rose proudly the castle of Orthez, the seat of the Counts of Foix and Princes of Bearne, sending forth, through the painted glass of its traceried windows, clouds of splendour and perfumes which seemed to envelop it in a lambent glory.

From time to time also gushed forth floods of tumultuous or placid harmony, mingled with gleeful voices and loud laughter, toasting, cheering, jingling of bottles and glasses, jubilant shouts, and deafening clamour, all confused, indistinct, fantastic, almost diabolical, and the whole palace seemed to tremble beneath the measured tread of multitudinous dancers.

The happy castle was crowded with the flower and cream of the noblesse and chivalry of France, the grandees, grand masters, barons and knights of Arragon, Castile, and Navarre. The Spaniards displayed ample and majestic Byzantine tunics of richest silk

cloth and gold brocade, faced with ermine, in which they were wont to array themselves on solemn occasions, in order to do honour to guests of distinction ; while the French, not without a sort of envy, wore the short costume which was becoming so common at that period, although without the brilliant and diversified colours with which the cavaliers of other countries used to adorn themselves.

This magnificent concourse was owing not only to the lofty rank of the bride and bridegroom, but to the circumstance that the King of France and the ambassadors of three kingdoms were holding a congress on the frontiers, for the purpose of negotiating a peace between Navarre, Catalonia, and Castile.

All were at the moment amicably confounded in the disorder with which the best arranged festivals always terminate, around spacious tables, where might be seen scattered about large goblets of finely wrought gold and silver, enormous glass bottles covered with a double casing of esparto, and remains of viands and pasties which had survived the frightful catastrophe in which perished the most savoury birds that haunt the Pyrenees, the fattest beeves from their valleys, the most exquisite fish from the Bay of Biscay, and even the most delicate salmon trout

from the crystalline waters of the Bidassoa and the Gabe.

The long banqueting hall, the theatre where were exhibited the famous exploits of so many noble cavaliers, not less able and willing to dispatch the compact and interminable rows of bottles filled with the wines of Peralta, Bordeaux and Champagne, than to demolish the infidel phalanxes of the Moors of Granada—the great hall, we repeat, hung with rich Venetian tapestry, adorned with the portraits of the Counts of Foix and Bearne, already showed the refinement which Gothic architecture had attained at that period, in the minute and exquisite workmanship of the magnificent roof, which, gilded by the most cunning artificers, seemed one immense live coal in the ruddy splendour of the wax-lights.

All the chairs had their backs embroidered with the arms of the prince and princess, composed of bulls and bezants.

Among the French cavaliers, the Duc de Bourbon and Messire Jean de Rohan occupied the first rank; foremost among the nobles of Navarre were the stern and inflexible Mosen Pierres de Peralta and the Marques de Cortes, and among the Castilians, the most conspicuous for his elegance and lofty bearing was Don Ruy Diaz de Mendoza.

There were scarcely any ladies in this disorderly apartment to restrain with their presence the rude licence which reigned among those personages; the echoes of distant musical instruments now and then reached their ears, alluring them as a decoy to the dancing salons. But whether from absence of mind, indifference, or curiosity, certain it is that a young maiden, one of the Countess de Foix's ladies, remained standing at a window, which was thrown open to moderate the excessive heat of the banqueting hall, and gazing at the stars with vague and melancholy looks.

The paleness and profound sadness of her countenance, her pensive air and motionless attitude, offered a striking contrast to the noise, bustle, freedom, and jovialty of the rest; but fortunately for her, no one took notice of that statue of antique marble, which looked as if wrought by Phidias to lean its arm on the cornice of a tomb.

We have already alluded to the petty rivalry in fashion which raged between the French and Spaniards in regard to dress; the former in particular, attaching too much importance to the splendour of the Castilians, neglected no opportunity of jeering at and mortifying them. The Duc de Bourbon, who was highly esteemed as a wit, and a gay and sprightly

companion, had just concluded a rather impertinent story, in which he betrayed an evident design to reflect upon Spanish gallantry.

A portion of the auditory showed symptoms of annoyance, when the Marques de Cortes rose with grave and tranquil air, and addressing the French cavalier, "Señor Duke," he said, "I don't see much that is extraordinary in what you have related; events of a somewhat more singular and much more authentic character took place in the year one thousand four hundred and——. I don't remember the precise date——"

"To the point, to the point," cried Messire Jean de Rohan, emptying a large goblet of gold filled with wine of Peralta, "what signifies the date?"

"Perhaps as much as the story," said the duke, somewhat piqued.

"Gentlemen," pursued the marques, with great calmness, "it was the year 1442, about the month of——"

"Marques, for heaven's sake don't be so tedious; although your circumstantiality is certainly most praiseworthy."

"Messire de Rohan, who hinders you from filling the goblet with Peralta as often as you wish?"

"In truth I should like to see who is capable of

such audacity," replied the French cavalier, "and I am going to try the experiment half a-dozen times in succession to see if I make a mistake."

"I must pursue my story," replied the imperturbable marques, "without provoking you to such efforts, for I assure you Messire Jean, that your head is none of the strongest. The banner of Arragon, then, had just fluttered in Naples for the first time over that of France, when the magnanimous Alphonso, one of the best monarchs of this century—"

"Alphonso the usurper! Alphonso the adulterer! Enough," interrupted the Duc de Bourbon, with bitterness.

"You are a Frenchman, Señor Duke, and i'faith you have been showing it very clearly for some time. The name of usurper can never be applied to a prince who triumphs over his enemies and knows how to preserve his conquests for so many years, like King Alphonso of Arragon. Adulterer! cast your eyes around, among the princes and high noblesse of Europe? Who among them is sufficiently innocent to throw at him the first stone? The king had a barren consort, he breathed the atmosphere of a burning climate, where the far-famed beauty of the country is not to be compared with that of the women; it was an error, I admit, but an error

for which passion is some excuse. Alphonso, then, fell in love with a poor but beautiful woman who lived in the Borgo, where the monarch went every night in disguise. For some time a particular expression was remarked in the countenance of Alphonso; his restlessness was excessive, but the gladness of his heart was betrayed in his countenance, plainly indicating that he was anxiously expecting some happy event. At length he was informed one day that he was a father. Ah! what a welcome sound to a king on whom the whole world smiled, but who was still without the smiles of a son, to a man whose glory would otherwise go down with him to the tomb! Trembling with love, joy, and impatience, he went muffled up in his cloak, and accompanied only by one of his most faithful servants, to see and embrace his daughter, for it was a girl that his beloved had just brought into the world. He found the door closed, he called Rachel, the Jewish foster mother of his beloved, but received no answer."

"Ah!" here ejaculated the lady at the window. No one heard that sigh.

"Again he tried the knocker," pursued the marques, who succeeded in arresting the attention of his audience, "and still the same silence. The heart of

Alphonso throbbed violently; a tempest raged within his breast; with the strength of desperation he forces the frail door from its hinges, crosses the threshold, calling aloud for the mother and child, but no other sound was heard than the echo of his voice through the dark and forsaken dwelling. He went groping from one apartment to another, until his feet coming in contact with a human body stretched upon the floor, he stumbled and nearly fell; he felt with his hands and found the dead body of a woman. What distress, what frightful anxiety! A light! a light! he shouted. For a light he would have given the half of his kingdom. A ray of the moon then penetrated through the open window of the room, lighting up the livid features of the lady. The fearful shriek which the hapless Alphonso uttered might have moved the hardest heart. He saw at his feet the mother of his child! He stood rooted to the spot with terror, but after a few seconds he awoke from his stupefaction, roaring like the lioness that has lost her young, calling on his beloved, calling on his daughter, calling on the Jewess, calling in vain on heaven itself, which was as deaf to his loud and frenzied appeals as all around him."

"From the moment you mentioned the Jewess,"

said Mosen Pierres de Peralta, "I thought there would be the devil to pay."

"But who told you such a strange story?" demanded Ruy Diaz de Mendoza.

"No one," replied the Marques; "I myself was present and saw the whole."

"You!" exclaimed all at once.

"Yes. I accompanied the unhappy monarch, and I was the confidant of his love."

"But let us know," said the Duc de Bourbon, "if the story ends as well as it has begun."

"The story, noble duke, is already finished; the king has never been able to learn what became of his daughter, or of the Jewess, the nurse of his beloved."

"Very well," pursued the implacable Duc de Bourbon; "this story has at least the merit that it can be wound up with a moral: the king Don Alphonso of Arragon committed a crime, and God made his sin the instrument of his punishment."

"Noble duke," said the marques, who waited for this sally, in order to discharge all his bitterness; "if a frailty of the heart deserves so frightful a chastisement, with what tortures can a crime committed in such cold blood be expiated? What punishment does

he, who murdered Alphonso's lover and carried off his daughter, deserve?"

The countenance of the marques, which was somewhat animated during the recital of his story, now expressed bitter resentment.

"I would like to know, Señor Marques de Cortes, why you put that question to the Duc de Bourbon."

"Because the assassin was a Frenchman."

"A Frenchman!" all exclaimed in tumult, rising suddenly, and overturning tables with bottles, glasses, and dishes on the floor.

"Yes, a Frenchman, paid by the Duke of Anjou."

"And will you dare to maintain that everywhere?"

"Wherever you like."

"Outside the castle?"

"Without and within."

"Just now?"

"Why not?"

"Let us go forth."

"Yes; by all means."

But as they were leaving the banqueting hall they all turned their eyes to the opposite side, and found a young woman lying extended on the floor in the embrasure of the window, and who had fallen unobserved into a swoon during the relation of the story.

"Heavens!" exclaimed all.

"What is this?"

"She is dead."

"No, no, it is a fainting fit," answered the Marques de Cortes, taking her in his arms.

"But who is it?"

"One of the ladies of the countess."

"Ines!"

"Yes, Ines; I think her name is Ines," observed Mosen Pierres, with indifference.

"What has happened to her,—what have they done to her?"

"This all comes of the Marques de Cortes's stories, which only serve to terrify women and children," remarked his pitiless antagonist.

"Let her be immediately removed."

"Ines has been rather ailing," observed a cavalier who belonged to the neighbourhood. "She has never been herself since the banditti of the Bárdenas killed her father. She has become weak, pale, and taciturn."

"Poor child!"

"Oh, what a splendid creature she was some time ago! So fresh—so blooming—so—"

"Poor Ines!"

"Unfortunate girl! she must be very susceptible."

"Fudge, susceptible! it is only the vapours."

"No, the heat."

“ Perhaps the evening dew, the chill from the window, the cold draught.”

“ Not at all. The story ; the story.”

Ines was conveyed to her chamber in the arms of two servants.

These words were the echo of the transient sensation produced by her swoon, and they gradually died away into a languid, cold, indifferent conversation.

Unhappy Ines ! what a mystery she had discovered ! what secrets divined !

As there is no evil which may not bring good, the damsel's mishap produced at least one good result.

The minds of those who were over-excited became more calm. The Admiral of France, Jean de Rohan, who preserved more discretion than his friends, notwithstanding the numerous caresses he bestowed on the wine-cup, acted as mediator between the angry cavaliers ; and, after the interchange of a few concessions, the dispute terminated, as after-dinner quarrels frequently do, with a general toast, given on this occasion in honour of Spanish heroism and French gallantry.

The devil, however, who is never idle, tempted one of the Spanish nobles present to ask the Admiral why he did not go to the dancing salon.

“ Impossible, my friend,” replied de Rohan,

“ Why ? you are not so old.”

"You are perhaps surprised that whenever I am at a banquet I always make a barricade of bottles around me. It is not for love of drinking, but to guard against the temptation of breaking a promise."

"Not to dance?"

"Yes."

"Made to God?"

"No; to the most beautiful of women, the most unfortunate of queens, to Doña Blanca of Navarre."

Strange was the effect produced by that name, pronounced so inopportunately in the palace of Bearne, and at the marriage of the heir of that illustrious house.

It was to no one a mystery that the bridegroom's mother harboured a mortal hatred against her sister, Doña Blanca, without whose death or formal renunciation of the throne of Navarre it was impossible for the former to live in tranquillity; and, what is more, it was impossible that Louis the Eleventh should have consented to the connexion of his sister Madeleine with the house of Foix.

What had become of Doña Blanca? Few or none could tell; but no one doubted, since the nuptials were going to be celebrated that night, that Doña Blanca had been poisoned, like her brother Carlos, or that she was shut up in perpetual imprisonment under the custody of her sister, the countess.

It was a gross indiscretion, an unheard-of recklessness, to utter the name of the victim in the house of the sacrificers, and perhaps at the very moment when the holocaust was offered up.

"What foolish reminiscences,!" exclaimed Pierres de Peralta, with a gesture of displeasure.

"It is easily seen that you have drunk more than enough," his countrymen whispered to the Frenchman. "Why do you mention the halter in the house of the hangman?"

"What are you afraid of?" cried the fearless Admiral, in whose brain the fumes of the wine did not leave much room for prudence. "When the charming princess, Doña Blanca of Navarre, was married to Henry the Fourth, King of Castile, I had the inestimable honour of dancing with the royal bride; and when the dance was over I swore to the queen that I would never dance, as long as I lived, with any other woman, in order that I might preserve an indelible recollection of so signal a favour.* By heaven! is she not—or was she not—the most lovely woman that ever sat on the Castilian throne?"

All the bystanders, astonished or scandalized, remained silent, and the Admiral, taking advantage of

* Historical.

the silence, which was only interrupted by low murmurs, continued with great enthusiasm :—

“ Never were seen greater rejoicings than those which were then celebrated, from the moment the princess touched, at Logroño, the soil of Castile. With what magnificence, splendour, and gallantry did the Count de Haro then comport himself ! What a display of abundance, what a variety of the most savoury viands, prepared not only for the personages of the royal escort, but for the entire people ! Don’t you recollect, Ruy Diaz—you who distinguished yourself so highly at the tournament as the champion of Doña Blanca—don’t you recollect the proclamation issued by the admirable count, that nothing was to be bought in the market, but that all, rich and noble, plebeians and peasants, should take freely whatever they chose ? How greatly was I then charmed with the Castilian character ! In the Chateau of Briviesca there was an inclosure converted into a verdant park of velvet turf ; another represented a wood, where bears, wild boars, and stags were hunted, with fifty hunters and numerous packs of stag and blood-hounds ; and all the wild beasts that were killed were brought and laid as trophies at the feet of the august and beautiful Doña Blanca, who presided over the games, seated under a canopy of crimson brocade. These were celebrated

at night, with such a multitude of torches that no one needed to regret the light of day. In another inclosure was exhibited a spacious lake filled with fish of various colours, ploughed by gilded skiffs, in which the most beautiful women, in the most fanciful costumes, fished with hooks and nets. The whole population were radiant with happiness and contentment, and not a shade of sadness gave presage of the crowd of misfortunes which were soon to overtake the hapless princess, who, treading on flowers and eastern carpets, welcomed with acclamations by all the people, and breathing perfumes and essences, arrived at Valladolid, where were celebrated for the space of forty days tournaments with sharp weapons, as well as arms of courtesy, at which Don Ruy Diaz de Mendoza was distinguished above all by his gallantry."

All eyes were now turned towards the noble cavalier, who had just received the eulogium of the Admiral of France.

As the former stood near the door, his eye fell on a superbly-dressed lady, of haughty bearing, who, with her arms folded, and a certain malignant smile on her lips, was listening with imposing calmness to the count's enthusiastic description.

None of the bystanders could refrain from an exclamation of surprise ;—even the Count de Rohan,

somewhat disconcerted and agitated, said "The countess!"

Such was the influence that this woman of masculine beauty, and bold piercing look, exercised over the minds of the most illustrious men of her time.

"Yes, it is I," said Doña Leonora de Foix, slowly approaching the centre of the magnificent apartment, "it is I, Messire Jean de Rohan; I heard the well-merited encomiums which you passed on my beloved sister, Doña Blanca, and I thought it right not to interrupt you by my presence, supposing that you might, doubtless from fear of offending my modesty, suspend a narrative which was so flattering to me."

The ironical smile on her lips contrasted in such a manner with the softness and gentleness of her words, that the Admiral felt surprised and confused, not knowing how to answer her. Nevertheless, she continued, "I come likewise to communicate a piece of news, gallant admiral;—my dearly beloved sister, Doña Blanca of Navarre, the divorced spouse of the King of Castile, is to be very soon in this castle, in order to honour the nuptials of my son with her presence."

"Is it possible?"

"The princess here!"

"Whence does she come?"

"What became of her?"

Such were the exclamations with which the words of the countess were received. The cavaliers all knew the irreconcilable hatred which separated the two sisters, and no one could give credit to so strange an announcement.

"Doubt not, madam, that you have just given me news which fills me with delight," answered Messire de Rohan, at length, with noble frankness and loyal feeling; "let me again see that illustrious lady, who has not beheld the sun of her fortune since the day that preceded that of her nuptials; let me again behold her in the arms of a sister, with whom she has hitherto thought herself at enmity, and this heart will not fail to throb as in the days of my youth."

"You will see her, yes, you will see her, in the arms of her sister, to whom she has just ceded all her rights to the crown of Navarre. But do not think that you will be able to-night, after the lapse of years, to dance without breaking your gallant promise; you will see her, in the humble garb of a nun, prefer an immortal crown, which God reserves for those who persevere till the end in his service, to one which must be only borne as a burden, as a cross which God imposes on us."

Although at this period even crimes were wrapped up in a certain religious phraseology, the language of the countess seemed too daringly hypocritical.

Nevertheless, all the cavaliers hastened to offer her a thousand congratulations ; and she, taking the arm of Mosen Pierres de Peralta, disappeared, casting haughty and triumphant glances in the face of the noblesse of three kingdoms.

"But, countess, is she come already?" said he of Peralta to her in a whisper.

"She will soon come."

"But, according to my calculation, she ought to be here already."

"She will be."

"You say so with a confident tone."

"Constable," replied the countess, with a resoluteness of manner that confounded that personage "neither the King of France, nor his sister Madeleine will permit the Bishop, Don Nicholas de Chávarri, to pronounce the nuptial benediction until Blanca has arrived at my castle ; and do you, who know me, think that Doña Blanca is not to come?"

"It is now late."

"Ten minutes ago, I received a message from Sancho de Erviti."

"That is another matter. And what does he say?"

"A page came on a league in advance in order to notify to me the speedy arrival of his master. The sentinels of the castle have received orders to admit within the walls a litter, accompanied by sundry cavaliers."

"Oh, then you may remain easy."

"Nevertheless, something is wanting. — Mosen Pierres, I am a mother, and I cannot find my son, although I have searched all the apartments."

"In truth, he was melancholy to-day, and I also miss him. Do you wish me to search for him?"

"No; leave that care to his mother. Now withdraw, Constable."

"I salute the new princess of Viana!"

"The future queen of Navarre will know how to reward your services and attentions."

They exchanged an obeisance, and retired in opposite directions.

CHAPTER IX.

THE same rays of troubled splendour which lighted the Princess of Viana and her valiant deliverer on the road to Orthez, penetrating through the painted windows in the gothic arches of a gallery in the basement of the castle, shone upon the pale forehead of a youth of eighteen years, covered with a black velvet bonnet encircled with a band of brilliants. He walked up and down beneath the sombre and deserted vaults of those awe-inspiring arcades, his right hand on his dagger, and the other hand in the ample folds of his mantle. Handsome, gallant, and of gentle presence, he showed in his countenance and movements the natural vivacity of youth ; and the vexation and sadness with which he found himself suddenly overwhelmed, plainly indicated that that flower, but recently severed from the stem of its happiness, still preserved its former dyes and fragrance. His steps, were sometimes hurried and at others languid and

heavy ; and frequently he stopped suddenly and remained for a while pensive and motionless, like the statue of grief. His gestures doubtless corresponded to the changeful hue of his thoughts.

As the sound of his steps was repeated by the echo in the corners of the gallery, he did not observe that a lady approached with firm tread, and remained for a moment in the shade with her eyes fixed upon him.

Not even the rustling of the long velvet robes with which the lady swept the ground could rouse him from his musings as she drew near him, nor did he become aware of her presence until a harsh, piercing voice at his side made him tremble involuntarily :

“Gaston !” it said.

“Mother !” answered the youth, with more of melancholy than surprise.

“Gaston, my son !” repeated Doña Leonora, in a softer tone ; “what are you doing here ? What is the matter with you ?”

“I am ready, madam.”

“Oh ! you say that as if I were announcing to you that you must go to the scaffold.”

“Do you not come to announce to me that the bishop waits us at the foot of the altar ?” replied the youth, with a bitter smile.

“No, not yet.”

"Why do we tarry so long?"

"Is this impatience, my son?"

"Impatience! Yes, you are right. Since you have granted me so few moments of liberty, let us abridge them. I shall then have less to sigh for all my life."

"But is this the place where I ought to find you at such a moment?" said the countess to him in a tone of gentle reproach. "Two kingdoms divest themselves of their pomp and splendour, of their most beautiful women, and most illustrious men, to do honour to your nuptials. The flower and cream of chivalry resort from distant lands to the palace of Orthez, and do you avoid their presence? What is the matter? what has happened to you? Who has offended you? From here we can distinguish the noise of revelry, the cadence of the dance, the placid echo of the instruments; joy reigns every where; and you, for whom all these festivities are celebrated, for whom so much rank and beauty are here assembled, you alone look grave and thoughtful, with a sadness unbecoming your youth and that good fortune which makes you the envy of all."

"But, mother, who misses me?" replied Don Gaston, with a sigh; "who, besides yourself, takes note of my absence from the festive halls? What

need has any one of my presence to add to his happiness? Allow me, dear mother, allow me to remain alone. Here, at least, I am neither despised nor insulted."

"Despised—insulted! No, no, it is impossible! The son of Doña Leonora de Navarre despised and insulted would not remain tamely in this place."

"Be calm, Doña Leonora. I must submit to the affronts which have been offered me; the sword cannot avenge them."

Don Gaston then, regretting the words which had escaped him in spite of himself, took her by the hand, and leading her close to the window of the gallery, said to her with tenderness and emotion:

"Have you invited to my marriage the man who almost sacrificed his life in saving mine, my friend Ximeno, the most valiant captain in Navarre?"

"The captain of the Free-Companions? no," replied the countess, unable to conjecture what Don Gaston was aiming at with that question.

"I entreated you to do so, mother; you have not done so, and I am sorry I have had to remind you of it."

"If you are very anxious—if your sadness arises from this cause——"

"No, it matters not. My happiness, as you call it,

does not deserve the trouble of being thus consulted. But now that you are here, mother, alone with your son, now that no one sees us but the melancholy planet which silently contemplates my sadness, now that I know the famous hero Ximeno de Acuña, to whom I owe my life, has not come, tell me, is there any one in the halls of the palace, who in his heart misses the absent bridegroom?"

"Can you doubt it?" exclaimed the countess with surprise, and then added with a lukewarmness which indicated how feeble was her own conviction of what she said, "Madeleine, your bride, is in the greatest disquietude ——"

"No, you are deceived, or rather you wish to deceive me," said Gaston, with energy, interrupting her. "The haughty sister of the King of France, the august princess who unites her golden *fleur-de-lis* to my castles, bulls and bezants of Foix and Bearne, is, as you know, mother, full well, incapable of loving. Silly, arrogant with the splendour of her royal birth, if she has a heart it throbs only when her pride and vanity are flattered."

"But, Gaston," replied his mother, with a calmness of manner that chilled him, "what can it concern your happiness—what does it matter, provided

you are her husband, and brother-in-law to Louis the Eleventh King of France?"

"Ah! you are right," answered the youth, with a bitter smile. "You are right. It signifies nothing. If I, an inexperienced youth, bend my neck to the yoke of matrimony, espousing a person that I did not know, a lady who shines rather by her pride than her beauty, I must nevertheless smile complacently, live tranquilly, and fancy myself fortunate, because this woman, whom I now regard with indifference, and whom I may perhaps come to detest, is sister to the most powerful monarch on earth."

"Poor boy! You have still to learn that he who is born under the shadow of a throne, is not born to love; that his marriage does not unite heart with heart, but state with state."

"You say well, mother, that I am a boy; but I have very recently learned to my cost what you now wish to teach me, and I have also come to know that whoever can exhibit the greatest number of quarters on his escutcheon, or can boast of most titles of dignity and honour, will always be master, and regard his partner as a slave."

"What do you say, my son?" asked Leonora, with a start.

"Do you not understand me?"

"Gaston, Gaston ! I would rather not understand you."

"Have the goodness to hear me, Doña Leonora. Suppose that your son, Don Gaston, without having seen anything more of his wife than the faithless image traced by a flattering pencil, yields to the entreaties with which his tender and affectionate mother importunes him. I will be still more frank : suppose also that your son yields under the dazzling fascination of ambition, and promises his cold and indifferent hand this night to a woman, who, likewise, bestows on him a hand not less cold and indifferent than his. It is true that Don Gaston is the heir of the Counts of Foix and Princes of Bearne ; that his mother is daughter of Don Juan II., King of Arragon and Navarre. But what are all these titles to the sister of Louis of France, whose eyes are accustomed to see around her, vassals who occupy thrones and wear purple ? What is the countship of Foix ? What is the principality of Bearne ? What is the barony of Moncada ? What is all this in the eyes of Madame Madeleine ?"

The overweening pride of the countess was deeply hurt by these words, and wounded pride and self-love awakened in her a nobler passion—maternal love.

"She, she! despise my son!"

"Your son, madam, acknowledges himself inferior to his wife, and must submit to her haughty disdain, her arrogance, that humbles and crushes him."

"No, you would not be my son and endure such an affront; but what has happened to you? what did she say to you?"

"Oh! when she deigns to open her lips in my presence it is only to utter lamentations for what she has lost, contempt for the present, and apprehension for the future."

"Peace, peace, my son, every word you utter is a dagger to your mother. She despise my son! she hold him cheap! she refuse to acknowledge the treasures which his heart incloses! She does well, she does well, while his obscure forehead is confounded and unknown amid the crowd of feudal chiefs. She does well! yes; but the day will come when the sun now hid in clouds will suddenly appear on a throne, and dart thence rays of living splendour that will dazzle her."

"Mother, mother, what do you mean?" interrupted Gaston, filled with joy as well as terror at hearing this enthusiastic outburst of the countess.

"Nothing! bear with these manifestations of disdain, and bury resentment in the depths of your heart,

for if your mother rules over vassals, we are still the vassals of a king, we have yet a superior on earth. But you will very soon encircle your brows with a diadem; you will have God alone above you—God alone, and no one else. Do you doubt it?" added Leonora, seeing that her son was confounded and astonished at her words.

"Oh, no, I will not doubt it, mother, I never had greater need of believing you; a crown—"

"It shall be yours."

"Heavens!"

"You shall have it. But then—"

"Then," exclaimed Don Gaston, his eyes kindling and flashing, "then I will take the royal purple, and throwing it at the feet of my spouse, 'Conceal your arrogance,' I will say to her, 'conceal it with this mantle which you receive from my hand as a chastisement for your presumptuous vanity.' But, alas! these are idle dreams, mother; how is it possible that they can be realised?"

"Listen," answered the Countess, "it is now time to reveal all to you. I see that your heart enters with enthusiasm on the path which conducts us to greatness and dignity. This path is surrounded by precipices, and our progress, perhaps, interrupted by troublesome claimants; but courage and calmness

will enable us to pass the former in safety, and there are means by which we can rid ourselves of the latter."

Don Gaston looked at his mother almost with fear; but fascinated by her ardent gaze he could not open his lips.

The countess continued, without changing her manner.

"I am the younger daughter of the King of Navarre; between me and the throne I had a brother and a sister; well, the eldest, Carlos, the Prince of Viana, is dead," said Leonora, with a hollow voice; "he died in the flower of youth, as if heaven meant to punish him for having rebelled against his king and father."

Here the countess was obliged to pause; her brow, bathed in cold perspiration, became gradually contracted, and a sombre thought traversed it like a black cloud hurrying across the sky, driven by the breath of the tempest.

Her son meanwhile waited for the end of those terrible revelations, as the terrified rider who expects that his unmanageable horse will precipitate him into an abyss. Doña Leonora now became calm, and continued with firm accent.

"The Prince of Viana being dead, my sister Doña

Blanca is the only obstacle, the only barrier between me and the throne ; and this barrier is also surmounted.

"Great God !" exclaimed the prince, with a look of terror.

"No, fear nothing. This divorced queen, who in her ambitious schemes, and in her conduct imitates my brother Carlos, heaven rest his soul, will not dare to persevere in following his track to the end of her career. . She will not die like him ; but she will have to renounce her right, or live imprisoned for ever in this castle."

"Oh ! mother," exclaimed Don Gaston, who was filled with horror though restrained by timidity, and whose good feelings struggled with his filial respect ; "Oh ! mother, what is a diadem purchased with so many crimes ?"

"A diadem is your exaltation over those who now look down upon you with scorn ; it is the humiliation of those who subject you to humiliation, it is in short—the object of our desires."

"But reflect that when I gird my brows with a crown obtained by such means, it will scorch me as if it were red hot iron."

"Gaston, your scruples are now in vain ; all that

you say comes too late. To what do we owe the distinguished honor which the King of France confers on us by consenting to the marriage of his august sister with you who are nothing more than the son of a Count, with you who, but for the death or the renunciation of Doña Blanca could never be anything more than the son of a feudal chief? It is now time you should know all: an article in the contract of this marriage entered into between the King of France and the King of Navarre and Arragon, my august father, positively prohibits the celebration of the nuptials until I have in my power this rebel sister, whom not I but my father and sovereign, wishes to disinherit."

"So that it appears you have the princess in safe keeping in the castle?"

"Not yet," replied Doña Leonora, "but you see I am tranquil. She will arrive to-night without fail, and we shall immediately disclose to her the death of her brother; this very night she will see the secret order of our father, who deprives her of all her rights, and counsels her to renounce them unless she wishes to be publicly and ignominiously disinherited, this very night I shall be acknowledged as the princess of Viana. The king, my father, has already one foot in

the grave, and I have one on the steps of his throne ; let me reign but one fortnight, let me satisfy this necessity, the only one I now feel, and I will then tear the crown from my head, and place it myself on yours. My whole happiness will be comprised in seeing you upon the throne, looking with proud disdain on the woman who insults you."

" You will reign, because you have entered on the path which leads to the throne ; I, who am ashamed to advance in it a single step, I will never reign."

And Gaston felt so humiliated in his own eyes that, without uttering another word, without raising his forehead which glowed with shame, he shrugged his shoulders and hurried away from the corridor.

The countess, filled with rage and vexation, remained a few moments behind, undoing with her restless fingers the pearls of her girdle, the tassels of which almost trailed on the ground ; and she was already preparing to leave, terrified at the solitude in which she was left, and at the darkness which reigned in the cloisters, from the disappearance of the moon, when she heard hurried steps and then an agitated voice which said to her " Señora, Señora !"

" Who is it, who calls me ?"

" It is I, Countess."

“Constable! I did not know you—you have frightened me. Your voice—But what news do you bring? What means this agitation?”

“All is lost.”

“Lost!”

“Yes, the princess has escaped.”

“Impossible! How? Where? and the escort? and Sancho?”

“The escort is dispersed, Sancho is dead.”

“Ah! the Count de Lerin! But how do the partizans of the rebel faction dare to penetrate into my territories, how do the troops.—”

“It was not troops, it was not partizans.”

“Who then?”

“A single person, a friend of ours.”

“Heaven protect me! Mosen Pierres, you must be raving! one man against five! against Sancho de Erviti! it cannot be—the news is false, evidently false—and do you say that he is an Agramontese?”

“I say that the news is certain; that the cavalier was coming to the marriage, and there is here a squire who survived the catastrophe to bring us such good news—”

“But if all those who were invited have already come, if no one is missing?”

“Then it must have been the devil, who is quite

welcome to take me if I say not the truth !" replied Mosen Pierres, somewhat nettled ; " the fact is that the squire is here, and, what is more, the empty litter is here, and as the mules found the way home themselves, and as the sentinels had orders to let the litter pass—"

" Mosen Pierres, we are lost," exclaimed the countess, pale as death.

" You finish where I began."

" Dispatch some soldiers from the garrison of the castle, the most trustworthy cavaliers, the servants, the pages—everybody in pursuit of the miscreant."

" Anything else?"

" But, good God ! what do you mean by this coolness of manner?"

" With this coolness, madam, I have done all that you have thought of ; and I have only further to mount my horse and try to fall in with—"

" Thanks, thanks, Constable !" interrupted Leonora. " But of course you have concealed—"

" No one knows the motive of this alarm except yourself and me."

" Oh ! if that woman should ever come to the throne—"

" Don't be uneasy."

" But if she again falls into my power—Oh ! she

shall never more escape," said the countess, as she quitted the corridor, clenching her hands, and with an expression of unrelenting cruelty, which clearly revealed the intention of a bloody crime.

Soon afterwards she might be seen walking through the festive halls with an air of triumph, distributing salutations on each hand as she passed, with slight movements of the head and courteous smiles.

The tranquillity, the enjoyment exempt from fear, which beamed in the countenances of the guests, the eagerness with which they abandoned themselves to the pleasures of the dance and the feast, were sometimes matter of consolation to the countess, a sure pledge of the fugitive character of the tempest that had been raised, and at others an insupportable agony, a bitter sarcasm, with which destiny tortured her heart.

And as she was neither able to bear it, nor, at certain moments, to dissemble her anxiety, she quitted the hall to enquire cautiously as to the events which were occurring in the castle, and returned in desperation to the salon, biting her white handkerchief with her teeth to arrest her gushing tears of rage, which by inflaming her eyes in their course might have excited among her guests suspicion of the infamous plot.

Thus passed the minutes, thus the hours of that night—a night short, gay, exquisitely delightful to the guests—but to the mistress of the mansion, eternal, cruel, agonisingly agitated.

Oh ! how dearly purchased are the bitter gratifications of crime !

CHAPTER X.

WE informed our readers in the last chapter but one that poor Ines had been carried to her chamber in the arms of two servants, who, placing her in a chair inclined backwards a little, so as to support her body, were enabled to remove her without much difficulty ; and while all this was going on she gave no sign of consciousness. It is true that we then omitted these minute details, and perhaps we ought to do so now, but we cannot resist the temptation of showing how well-acquainted we are with circumstances which occurred three hundred and thirty-three years ago. Besides, it is probable that some learned antiquary may carefully investigate this event, and refer to our evidence in a dissertation wherein he will enlighten future ages as to the proper method of transporting young ladies who fall into fainting fits. To this consideration we attach great importance ; and having now, therefore tranquillised our conscience, which is natu-

rally timid and scrupulous, we shall pursue our narrative without omitting a single atom, in order that mankind may not be deprived of the antiquary's profound and edifying lucubrations.

But the fact of the matter is, that at this point all details cease, and the most ponderous chronicles—among which the present has the honour of being reckoned, even in a higher degree than that of the celebrated friar of Irache—do not inform us whether Ines went to bed, remained in the chair on which she was carried out of the banqueting hall, or quickly recovered from her swoon; nor do they tell us whether her attack came under the designation of syncope, vertigo, deliquium, or asphyxia. They content themselves with saying that Ines remained alone because the servants were very anxious to have their supper; a circumstance that will furnish the antiquary aforesaid with evidence that hunger was already known in the fifteenth century.

There can be no doubt that in all ages it is better to be alone than in bad companionship. A short while, therefore, after the disappearance of the pages, lacqueys, squires or chambermaids (for history does not specify to which class they belonged), there were heard frequent and prolonged sighs in Ines's chamber, a sure indication that she was returning to

herself. and not much time elapsed before the door opened, a lady issued from the apartment wrapped in a long black veil, and, with firm step and throbbing bosom, threaded the corridors leading to the principal staircase. On descending the latter, either her knees or courage began to give way at the first landing ; for she leant, as if unable to sustain herself, on the stone balustrade, at both ends of which reposed two marble lions, supporting huge shields of gilt bronze, with a castle upon a bridge, bordered with six bezants.

“Oh ! how weak I feel !” ejaculated the dark figure, with a groan, which was lost among the toasting and cheering which echoed from the neighbouring scene of carousal. “I know not if I shall have strength enough ; but I must see her ; I must make her understand that I know all. Ah ! I have no other link in the world ; I must weep and die on her bosom.”

As she uttered these words, Ines advanced a few paces, buried in her reflections, until she was roused from her pensive mood by the trampling of horses, whose hoofs resounded on the marble pavement of the court.

There had just entered at the principal gate of the palace, without any opposition to their transit on the

part of the sentinels, two mules, bearing a closed litter, and after them a gallant cavalier, who threw himself from his bay charger, and looked about him on all sides, with the object of finding some person of whom he might ask some question.

It was not long before his eye fell on Ines, who was slowly descending to the court by the magnificent and brilliantly lighted staircase.

The cavalier advanced towards her, with a courteous and resolute air, and said to her in hurried accents :

“ Will you tell me whether this is the palace of the Count de Foix ? ”

“ Ah ! ” ejaculated Ines, greatly agitated by the tones of the stranger’s voice, and then added, after recovering herself :—

“ Yes, yes it is.”

“ You are, perhaps, surprised at the abruptness of my question ? ”

“ No.”

“ Are you not a little startled at it.”

“ It may be so.”

“ Pardon me, señora, if I have caused you any alarm, or if I detain you ; but it is of importance that I should know if the son of the count is in the castle.”

“ He is.”

“ Will you have the goodness to conduct me to his presence ? ”

“ He is, probably, among the guests, in the tumult of the festivities.”

“ Oh ! I wish to see him alone, quite alone, and that my arrival should be observed by no one.”

“ It is impossible.”

“ Point out to me, for heaven’s sake, one of his most retired apartments. Have no suspicion, señora ; I am his friend, his intimate friend, Don Ximeno de Acuña.”

“ I know you,” said Ines, with a sigh.

“ O then—I doubt not that—”

“ Come with me.”

“ Wait, señora,” replied the cavalier, with some embarrassment, “ I don’t come alone—I bring—a woman.”

“ A woman ? ”

Ines’s heart began to throb violently.

“ Yes, a nun ! ”

“ Ah ! a nun ! answered the maiden, like one who is relieved of a heavy burden.”

“ Yes, a Benedictine nun, who was a captive in the hands of certain villains, from whom I have rescued her ; and in her name I come to crave hospitality.”

“ Always generous ! always brave ! ” replied the

lady, her eyes wandering over the pavement, while her thoughts flew away to the castle of Egúarás."

"You will now understand that we must avoid the revels."

"Come with me."

"That we have need of silence and solitude—"

"Come, come both of you."

The moment the captain perceived that the rescued captive was included in the invitation, without waiting for a repetition of it, he went straight to the litter, and opening the door, said to the nun in a whisper :—

"Come, Ximena, come. We are in safety."

"Whose castle is this?" asked the princess.

"A friend's, a brother's. But, speak not; lean on my arm, cover yourself with your veil, and come along."

And preceded by Ines, who went a short way in advance, they passed through obscure and deserted corridors, until they reached a chamber faintly illuminated by the flickering light of a solitary lamp.

During their transit there was no other noise heard than that of Ximeno's armour, which rendered that of their footsteps inaudible; nor did they make use of any other language, nor express any other emotions than those which were indicated by the beating of

their hearts, which throbbed in happy unison in the case of the two lovers, while the lonely heart of the unfortunate Ines heaved sadly and fitfully, like the lamp in that desolate chamber.

"Rest yourself here," said the captain to his companion, placing her gently in an elegantly carved ebony chair. "Señora," he then added, turning to their guide, "I have no objection to see my friend in the midst of the festivities; conduct me to his presence, and this I will regard as the crowning act of your kindness."

"Come," replied the lady, taking her hand, which was pale as marble, from under her long veil, and with so weak a voice that she needed the aid of that gesture to make herself understood.

The captain followed under the guidance of the lady, and on reaching the threshold of the door, turned his head to take leave of Ximena with his eyes. Let us cast ours back to the former chapter, where we saw Don Gaston de Foix fleeing from his mother, confounded and terrified at the crimes which he had seen, and still more at those of which he got but a faint glimpse; they girded his soul with a species of magic circle—a metallic net, like that of Vulcan, isolating him from the world where reigned peace, virtue, honesty, and tranquil enjoyments.

Gaston left the gallery with hurried steps ; and as if that solitude were not sufficiently profound to hide his sorrow and shame, he mechanically directed his steps towards a retired apartment, where he was wont to stay before he thought of surrendering his liberty as a bachelor. Instinct now led him, a few moments before he was to be fettered by the detested bond, to seek that chamber which was, to him, haunted by grateful reminiscences.

On crossing the threshold, he observed, not without displeasure, that the room was lighted,—for light is, perhaps, the most importunate enemy to the indulgence of sorrow.

He closed the door after him, and heaving a deep sigh, ejaculated with broken voice :—

“I am alone, completely alone. O that I could thus live, separated for ever from what I most love. Ah ! was love, was happiness made for me ? To be obliged to abhor my mother as I detest my wife ! No ! I cannot consent to this sacrilegious union. I must not ascend an altar whose steps have been hewn by crime.”

And falling into a deep reverie, a species of relaxation which the mind always finds after serious meditation, Gaston sat down before a table, on which lay open a beautiful vellum book, profusely and exquisitely

illuminated. It was the breviary in which he used to pray; a devotional practice too common at that period for the son of the countess to be dispensed from it. He turned over the leaves mechanically, until his abstracted eyes fixed themselves at length on it, and after reading a verse, he was suddenly assailed with a strange idea—to flee from his home, and bury himself for ever in a monastery, bursting at once all the ties which bound him to a world in which he could not live without holding his mother and his wife in abhorrence.

He rose agitated by these ideas, the struggle of his heart revealing itself in his outward disquietude; and what was his surprise, when, on turning his eyes, in one of his restless gestures, he saw the grave and imposing form of a nun rise at the further end of the chamber, with her arms folded, apparently in the attitude of imparting to him a message from heaven.

The terrified youth uttered a cry, stepped back, and laid his hand on his sword; all these rapid and involuntary movements were then followed by an instant of reflection, in which he thought himself visited by a celestial apparition; and falling on his knees, and covering his face with both hands, he repeated with tremulous voice a sentence which he had just read.

“Speak, Lord, speak, for thy servant heareth.”

The mind is never more prepared for superstitious impressions than when it has been prostrated by misfortune; it is then easy to think everything that occurs to us strange and supernatural. Crushed by the terrible reality of the sensible world, our imagination, always longing for consolation, carries us away into the world of illusions where we fancy we see the beautiful light of happiness shining invitingly before us.

On the other hand that coincidence of ascetic reflections with the unexpected apparition of a woman of beautiful and angelic aspect and majestic bearing, clothed in sacred vestments, was sufficient to disturb a stouter heart, and shake the nerves of older men, than Gaston de Foix.

Not less singular and extraordinary was the situation in which Doña Blanca found herself.

Utterly a stranger to all that she saw, ignorant of where she was, or whose castle afforded her an asylum, she could not comprehend by what combination of circumstances a young cavalier, who might have seemed from his martial aspect inaccessible to fear, should kneel reverently in her presence.

The princess, alarmed at his gestures and inexplicable language, fled in terror to the door.

"Who are you?" exclaimed de Foix, who began to recover from his hallucination.

"Open! I wish to go out."

"But who are you? Who has brought you here?"

"I know not; I am afraid; I wish to leave this."

"You are not without reason alarmed at my actions," replied Don Gaston, ashamed of his weakness; "I was very far from expecting this meeting when I came to my chamber."

"Ah! you are the owner of this castle?"

"Do you not know me?"

"I have never seen you before."

"Are you not come to the feast? Did you not see me at the ball, at the banquet? or am I so despicable that not even the eyes of my guests deign to look on me on the very day of my nuptials?"

"I do not know if you are being married; I don't know where I am: I am one that has just escaped from her enemies and implores your hospitality."

"God commands us to share our bread with the guests that honour us; strangers, señora, are the children of God who come to exalt our house. But pardon my indiscretion: I know that the virgins of the Lord sometimes leave their nunnery, but they

never travel alone : where is your sister, where is your companion ?”

This question completely perplexed the princess. Candid and innocent, it was impossible for her to lie ; delicate and modest, it was impossible for her to be silent.

“Whoever you are,” exclaimed Doña Blanca, “since you give me hospitality, you deserve my confidence ; know then that I am the mistress of my actions, from the moment that I was delivered from the hands of my persecutors, and that it is a lady not a nun who seeks protection in your house.”

“My house is yours, your persecutors are henceforth my enemies.”

“Without knowing me ? Without knowing them ?”

“What does it matter, señora ? You have crossed the drawbridge of our castle ; you have confided in our hospitality, and now you are to us a friend, a sister, a sacred person. You entered this house showering favours on its master ; when I came to this chamber my ulcerated heart was torn with anguish ; and the sweet expression of your eyes, the soft echo of your voice have gradually assuaged all my sorrows. In my first surprise, in my first bewilderment, I thought you an angel, a saint, one of those blessed spirits that God sends to his chosen servants. Now I

see that you belong to this world, but I see also that there are angels on earth. I shall never forget the good you have done me in tranquillising my anguish of mind. You have reconciled me to life, you have reconciled me to the world from which I thought of fleeing for ever."

"Flee from the world the day of your marriage!" exclaimed the astonished princess.

"I am not yet married."

"Ah! I can understand how life should be burdensome a few days after marriage; but I cannot understand how that should be the case before the nuptials are celebrated," replied Doña Blanca, the divorced wife of Henry, King of Castile. "But open," she added, "open this door; take me where there are people, where we shall not be alone."

"Señora, I came here in seach of solitude; but with you I will proudly present myself in the halls where the rank and beauty of three kingdoms are displayed, and all will be eclipsed in your presence. Come, and you will see my mother the countess."

"Your mother is a countess?"

"Yes, Countess de Foix and Princess of Bearne?"

"Great God! where am I?"

"In Orthez."

"In her power! in her castle!"

"But what is the matter? Good God! you seem overwhelmed."

Doña Blanca was now assailed by a horrible thought. When she saw herself brought by Ximeno to the same place whither her captives were taking her, to the place where she had most to fear, from which she must flee at all hazards; when she saw herself now abandoned in a closed apartment, and face to face with the son of her most cruel enemy, she began to suspect perfidy on the part of her lover.

Let us forgive her this fault; nothing is more likely to render us unjust than the obstinate persecution of misfortune, the continual recurrence of suffering. We must add in extenuation of her fault that this doubt wounded the heart of the princess more cruelly than the certainty of her own dangers.

"Have you a friend," she asked, with dejected accent, "named Ximeno, a native of the town of Mendavia?"

"Ximeno de Acuña is my best, my only friend."

"Is he a partizan of yours?" she persevered in asking, although with some degree of fear.

"Yes, but to what do these questions tend?"

"Does he belong to your troops?"

"He is the best lance we have: he alone has

overthrown more Beamontese than the axe of the woodman hews down branches."

"My God! my God! more Beamontese! more friends of his prince Don Carlos!"

"Yes, those who were friends of the Prince of Viana."

"Those who were!" replied Doña Blanca, who now began to tremble. "Has Carlos, then, been abandoned by his faithful Beamontese?"

"But whence do you come from not to know that the friends of the prince now proclaim his sister, Doña Blanca, as queen?"

"Has Carlos renounced his claim in favour of his sister?"

"Don Carlos is dead!"

"Ah! dead! my poor brother!"

These last words were uttered with faltering and scarce intelligible voice.

"Heavens! Who are you? What is the matter with you?" asked Don Gaston.

The princess had fallen senseless on the floor and could return no answer.

CHAPTER XI.

WHILE Doña Blanca and the son of the countess were conversing alone, alone also proceeded Ines, the captivating captive of the castle of Eguarás, and the captain of the Free Companions. Don Gaston did not know the princess, neither did Ximeno suspect for a moment that he was in the company of his romantic and adventurous friend.

As we are under the necessity of forgetting the two former, although only for a short while, our story must, in the mean time, relate what occurred to those who had just left the apartment in which most of the occurrences in the last chapter took place.

Ines was assailed by a strong desire to awaken the captain's recollections, by introducing that famous allegory of the bird and the cage, which set the seal to her transient conquest in the Bárdenas, while she had no less curiosity to learn the adventures of

Ximeno after he had so cruelly abandoned her : and moreover she also entertained a strong desire to know the cause of his strange arrival at the castle of Orthez, in company with a woman who, in spite of her monastic garb, seemed to her too beautiful not to be an object of apprehension. Although she could resist the promptings of her imagination, and the temptation of curiosity, she was not equally proof against the suggestions of suspicion or the instigations of jealousy.

"Will you tell me, cavalier," asked Ines, "in recompense for the trouble I am taking on your account, will you not tell me the name of this nun, whom I think I have seen in the monastery of ——"

"She is called sister—"

The captain stopped short.

"Of course the name of a nun must begin with sister," replied Ines, smiling bitterly beneath her veil.

"She is called—sister Ximena," promptly added the captain.

"Ximena! it is very strange that she should have the same name."

"The name of whom?" asked the cavalier, with a mixture of surprise and curiosity.

"Ximena!" repeated the lady, with a melan-

choly smile ; it is very odd that they should all be Ximenas."

" At what are you surprised ?"

" Ximena ! is it the same Ximena that you knew at Mendavia ?"

" The same—but how do you know—"

" Her that you have always loved ?"

" Always."

" Oh !" murmured poor Ines, " my allusion to his fault cannot even remind him of his love. And how many years is it since your Ximena took the veil ?"

" Señora, I do not know. I have just found her. I have just delivered her from her enemies. I think she is free, and that she loves me—"

" And do you think she will love you when she knows that you have been faithless to her ?" said the lady, with agitated voice.

" My God ! that accent brings to my recollection— Who are you ?"

" Do you think she will love you when I present myself to her ?" said Ines, raising her veil, and disclosing her pale and wasted countenance, lighted up by her large full eyes, which gave every indication of settled melancholy.

" Ines, Ines !" exclaimed the startled youth, seizing her hand, and fixing his astonished and compas-

sionate eyes on her countenance. "Poor Ines! how changed you are!"

"You have cruelly deceived me, but yet I forgive you, because I owe you the only moments of happiness which I have enjoyed. Where are you going now? Where have you come to, madman? To seek your friend Don Gaston; to seek refuge in the castle of the countess? Turn back, unhappy man, for here you can only meet women like me, who will inspire you with hatred, because they put you in mind of your errors; who will inspire you with apprehension, because your happiness hangs on their lips. Fly, for here you can only see treachery, horror, and the death of what you most love. Fly, and remember that you owe this advice to the woman whose heart you have broken."

"But what dangers threaten me? what treacheries surround me? How is it possible that you can make me doubt my friend, my brother?"

"Fly, I entreat you, from the countess and her family."

"Ines, Ines! explain to me for the love of heaven—"

"It is now, perhaps, too late," said the damsel, in a low voice, seeing the haughty and arrogant form of the countess make her appearance at the angle of the gallery.

It was one of those moments when the countess escaped from the crowd to give vent to her tears, which, however, she had now to repress suddenly, when she saw the armour of Ximeno gleaming in the depths of the corridor. She imagined, on seeing him in complete armour, that he was one of the troopers who had sallied forth by order of Mosen Pierres in pursuit of the princess, and her fears were converted into the hope of receiving some agreeable intelligence.

She quickened, therefore, her pace, and approaching the captain, eagerly demanded—

“Were you seeking me? What news do you bring? Have they been discovered?”

“That is just what this cavalier was talking about; he was asking for you—for the Countess de Foix,” answered Ines, with the view of extricating the captain from his dilemma.

“Well, here I am; what news do you bring?”

“Of whom?” asked Ximeno, in astonishment.

“Of the fugitives; of Sancho de Erviti; of any one.” And seeing that Ximeno still said nothing, she added, impatiently, “Were you sent here to gape at me in silence?”

“No, I have come here to tell you that I have with my own eyes seen Sancho de Erviti and two of his

squires lying dead ; that the rest fled in terror lest they should have to bite the dust like their comrades."

"And the fugitives, and my sister, and her deliverer, where are they concealed ?"

"Your sister ?"

"Yes, do you know nothing of her ?"

"Is the nun that was conveyed as a captive in the litter, your sister ?"

"Yes, my sister, did you not know it ?"

"Oh, but then what could she fear from you, if she had come to the castle ?"

"Of course she could have nothing to fear from me," replied Doña Leonora, with a sardonic smile which made the captain quake.

Ines also trembled, drops of perspiration fell from her cold and emaciated forehead ; she saw Ximeno hurrying from word to word, from question to question, into an abyss ; and although her fortunate rival should perish in it, the life of Ximeno was also exposed ; and him she resolved to bring safe out of this danger, even at the cost of her own life, even at the cost of her revenge.

"Imagine, cavalier," she said to him, with marked and deep significance, "what could Doña Blanca of

of Navarre, the Princess of Viana, fear at the hands of the Countess de Foix ?”

“She! she is Doña Blanca!” exclaimed the captain, who was thrown by this discovery into a state of stupefaction.

“This man is an imbecile ; but imbeciles are the fittest instruments for my designs,” said the countess to herself, and then added in a contemptuous tone, “are these the satisfactory news which you bring me?”

“As to satisfactory news I have none,” replied Ximeno, with a certain air of pride and resentment, “for the cavalier who has rescued your sister is so rash and arrogant that, beset as he sees himself on all sides, and in the midst of his enemies, he defies the whole world with his lance, and swears that he would lose a hundred lives in defence of her he has delivered from captivity.”

“Ah! do you know him? shall we find out at length who it is?”

“Yes, señora, he proclaims it himself, he is so daring that he does not fear to avow it ; it is Ximeno de Acuña, the captain of the Free Companions in the service of the king, Don Juan II. of Navarre.”

“The bandit! Enough, cavalier, I am obliged to

you for the information ; I know where my sister must be concealed. We shall find her, yes we shall find her, although it should be necessary to set all the forests of the Bârdenas on fire."

"The plan you suggest seems to me an excellent one, and if you wish I will go myself and put it in execution."

"Is Mosen Pierres de Peralta acquainted with this news?"

"I think he is still in ignorance, I wished to communicate them to you first of all."

"Well then, return immediately to the pursuit."

"This instant ; but you do not know what difficulties I have had to contend with in order to enter and leave this castle—your sentinels are so strict—if you gave me a token—"

"What is your name?"

"Garcés, do you not know him?" said Ines suddenly striking in, in order to get Ximeno out of another difficulty.

"Garcés," repeated the captain with a firm voice, for his unscrupulousness in adopting other names has been already made known in the course of this history.

"Well then, Garcés, take this ring, by means of which you can freely enter and quit the castle ; and

employ this facility in acquainting me frequently with whatever tidings you may learn."

"Do not be concerned, countess; I will make a good use of your talisman."

After having delivered the ring to him, Leonora left them in haste, being afraid that her absence from the ball would be observed; and while she was proceeding to the royally decorated salons, she composed her features, concealing the profound vexation, the gloomy disquietude, which racked her breast, under the mask of tranquillity and cheerful, gracious smiles.

"Thanks, thanks, generous Ines," exclaimed the captain, when the angle of the corridor hid the last folds of the countess's flowing mantle, as it swept along the pavement. "I owe you my life—my more than life—"

"Yes," replied Ines, with heroic but melancholy accent, "you owe me the life of the woman you love, you owe me the life of my rival."

"May heaven forgive me," exclaimed Ximeno, with sadness and humility, "may God pardon me if I have unwittingly placed my sacrilegious eyes on a queen. No, Doña Blanca de Navarre is not now your rival, Ines: Ximena is dead to me; let us fly to save the princess."

“Come, Ximeno, come; let me lean for the last time on your arm, for I feel my strength give way; and by this favour which you grant me, by the moments of bliss you have given me, I ask you to love the Queen of Navarre as you have loved the fair peasant of Mendavia.”

The captain gave his arm to Ines, who leant upon it, crossing both her hands; and in this manner they directed their steps slowly to the room where the nun had remained.

“Love her!” said Ximeno, “impossible, impossible!”

If he had had his visor raised, Ines might have seen two large tears rolling down the cheeks of the formidable warrior.

“Love her, Ximeno! Have faith in the words of Rachel; do you recollect? ‘Love Simon, my daughter, for Simon is worthy of you, and you are worthy of a prince.’—Transpose the names, and you will see how you are worthy, to my misfortune, of loving and being loved by the princess.”

In making this sublime effort of abnegation Ines shed a flood of tears, the only consolation, the only alleviation of her sorrows which she had experienced since she left the castle of Eguarás.

And without uttering a word more, they reached

the doors of the apartment, but before opening them there was heard the gentle creaking of a visor, followed by the echo of a kiss, the last dying twilight of a transient flame which was quenched for ever in a sea of troubles.

CHAPTER XII.

WE are now at length in the presence of Gaston and the princess; the latter motionless, insensible, lying prostrate like a statue in the midst of ruins; the former profoundly agitated, with violent passions powerfully struggling in his bosom.

The heart of the young prince indignantly revolted at the discovery of the dark schemes which were formed at the expense of his happiness; and which, although they might fascinate him for a few moments, before he knew their real nature, were now regarded by him as miserable intrigues, devised solely for the gratification of ambitious desires, which inspired him at the same time with grief and dismay.

He looked into the depths of his soul, a faithful mirror where were only reflected sentiments of chivalry, generosity, enthusiasm, all the noble passions in short, enveloped in a brilliant atmosphere, and

animated by that longing for love and glory which men of his temper feel with peculiar force. He sought there the image of the woman to whom he was to link his existence, and sought it in vain ; he found only the germs of that hatred and contempt with which ill founded arrogance and pride inspire noble hearts. He sought it, but instead of finding there a beloved spouse destined to share his joys and sorrows, he shuddered at seeing the image of another woman, much more beautiful, with all the charm and mystery of a celestial apparition ; an unknown beauty, whose kind and gentle regard, whose expression, dignified without haughtiness, sad without bitterness, signally contrasted with the haughty and capricious airs of her that was to become that night his perpetual companion.

It was the first time that he felt the force of love ; this was the first drop of affection which distilled from his heart ; love now took the place of abhorrence, he loved when even his sentiments of filial affection were blunted ; he loved, and that love was the only tie that bound him to the world : Oh ! how deep was his love !

Standing before the nun, who lay stretched on a bench, he regarded himself as the tutelar angel of that defenceless creature ; he proudly extended

over her the wings of his new-born love ; he devoured her with his eyes, and scarcely dared to breathe, in case he might disturb that placid repose, that transient slumber, the only period of his ascendancy over her, the sole brief moment, perhaps, of his happiness. How sweet, how flattering it was to him to defend a lovely, persecuted woman, who timidly sought refuge under his shadow ! How he contrasted his present with his past situation ! From being protected he became a protector ; instead of the agent of bloody intrigues, he had become the shield of innocence.

Gaston did not for a single moment doubt the innocence of the nun ; her words, her looks were vividly remembered ; and if he did not try to explain the effect produced on her by the intimation of Don Carlos' death, it was because his memory clung eagerly to those simple expressions in which she had disclosed to him that she was free.

"She is free," he said to himself, "and I am so still ; why do I not shake off the intolerable yoke which they wish to impose on me ? Why do I not shew myself for once resolute and unyielding, when the fate of my whole life depends on the effort ? I should be criminal indeed, and not less cowardly than criminal, if I lent myself as a docile instrument for

the accomplishment of iniquitous schemes, prompted by lawless ambition. Providence,—yes, Providence has led this angel hither by means unknown to me. At the first moment I thought her sent by God, and sent by God I must believe her still ; not, however, to separate me from human intercourse, but to reconcile me to the world.”

Such were the various thoughts and emotions by which Don Gaston was agitated, when the opening of the door roused him from his reflections. His first impulse was to strain the princess to his heart, from fear that she might be torn from him ; but he then reflected that he had no right to retain a treasure which was not his.

He went therefore to the door with resignation and dejection, threw it open, and, seeing a warrior standing on the threshold with his arms folded, he started back in astonishment, and exclaimed, with an accent of deep emotion,

“Heavens ! am I in a dream ? Ximeno !”

“What ! is it you, Don Gaston ? You in this apartment ! Zounds !”

“Come to my arms, my friend ; enter and welcome ; now I am not so unfortunate, because I have one to whom I can communicate my sorrows.”

Ximeno, who a few instants before would have

thrown himself on the bosom of his friend, continued motionless.

"Are you alone?" he asked, directing furtive glances to the back of the chamber.

"Alone! no; I am with an angel of enchanting beauty. Enter, and I will tell you the most extraordinary adventure you could possibly imagine. But now I remember she asked after you. Approach, my friend. Do you know who is this lovely woman lying there insensible? Can you tell me who brought her here?"

On hearing these questions, Ximeno was assailed by cruel doubts, some of which were soon, however, dissipated:—

Was he who made these inquiries the powerful lord of a castle, who wished, before giving free scope to his generosity, to know on whom his favours were to fall? Or, besides the castle, was he also possessor of a heart still greater, where he was not prevented from giving welcome to a new affection, by the circumstance that it was already occupied by the love which he ought to profess to his betrothed? Had Don Gaston been guilty of any discourteous action towards the princess? Was he, perchance, the accomplice of his mother? Had Blanca discovered that

she was in the house of her enemies ; and if not, why was she seized with that swoon ?

The captain fixed on this last interpretation, and, as our readers are aware, he hit upon the truth ; for it sometimes happens that the most favourable construction is the real one. But his jealousy, far from being dispelled, was excited still more by the stupefaction, by the incoherent expressions of the bewildered youth.

Ximeno, therefore, resolved to dissemble, and observe a prudent circumspection ; and to escape as soon as possible from a palace which he now regarded as the tomb of his affections.

“ You are silent ? Ah ! ” pursued de Foix ; “ you are not surprised at seeing her countenance. Doubtless you know her.”

“ Who the deuce has put that in your head ? ” coldly answered the princess’s paladin. And making a pause, as if to note the effect which his words produced, he proceeded with a certain degree of asperity, “ And even if I did know her, what would such information profit you ? ”

“ What ? Ah, you are right, my friend. Pardon my indiscretion. I was under an hallucination,—I thought that—”

Poor Don Gaston did not know how to dissemble his anxiety, or take in sail, after having spread it to the wind.

"Come, come, prince," said the captain, gravely, "you ought to have thought more of her health than her adventures."

And advancing to the door, he continued,—

"Enter, Ines, and lend her your assistance."

The young lady entered, to the great surprise of Gaston, whose disquietude contrasted greatly with Ximeno's firmness and presence of mind.

The latter closed the door, turned the key, took the lamp, examined the room to see if there was any other door : when his curiosity was satisfied, he left the light upon the table, and taking the prince to the corner farthest away from the ladies, "Now," he said to him, "I am ready to satisfy all your doubts."

The son of the countess perceived, doubtless, that he had acted too precipitately in disclosing his sentiments ; and trying now to assume as much calmness and indifference as he had at first betrayed excitement and interest, he replied :—

"In the first place, I would like to know by what happy chance we have been favoured with your presence in the palace ?"

"Is this curiosity or reproach ?"

"Ungrateful friend!" replied Don Gaston, with sincere feeling, "for the love of heaven do not maintain a gravity which hurts me, nor utter words which deeply vex me. Reproach at seeing you here! when you are the only person I missed from the marriage feast. Reproach indeed! when I was bitterly reproaching my mother for not having complied with my directions that you should be invited."

"These last expressions are quite unjust; for your mother as well as yourself, conveyed to me a kind message, inviting me to the marriage."

"I assure you that you are under a mistake. I know for certain that the countess sent you no message."

"Well, I know not how you can doubt it, for sure enough I have received an invitation."

"Strange things are occurring," exclaimed Gaston, his thoughts reverting to the fair unknown.

"Doubtless, heaven is the disposer of them," added Ximeno, with his eyes fixed on the nun.

"And now, will you not tell me who she is?" asked the youth.

"Are you really ignorant of that?"

"Oh! do not speak to me with that smile, and never doubt my sincerity: I may commit faults, but I am never guilty of meanness."

Ximeno was still, however, proof against the affectionate tone and sincere language of his friend.

How much he must have suffered to maintain such obduracy!

"Who this lady may be I know not," said the captain, "but I can inform you, in all their details, of the adventures to which her arrival at your castle is owing."

"Let me know what you know, and we shall together ascertain the rest."

"Tell me, first of all, do you love this woman?"

"Never did my heart know what it was to love, until my eyes beheld her."

"Indeed! so then, it is not a common passion? it is a real affection which you feel? If so, I consider myself bound to reveal to you all—all!"

The captain uttered these expressions in so peculiar a tone, with so cavernous a voice, and so malicious a smile, that he would at once have startled any one but a lover of fifteen years, in the ardent transports of his first passion.

Ximeno's breast resounded with those hollow growlings which precede the eruption of the volcano.

"Yes, a sincere love," replied the youth, who heard no other voice than that of his infatuated passion;

"a true affection which makes me reject another woman after having offered her my hand; which comes like a warning from Providence, to separate myself from the combinations of crime."

"Enough! interrupted Ximeno, with a voice of thunder."

"Heavens! what is the matter with you?"

"I say that I need hear no more, to understand that you love too much," replied the captain, repressing the rage of jealousy, and the horror with which he was inspired at so sacrilegious a revelation, made with all the candour of a virgin.

Then resuming his sarcastic tone, he proceeded with affected composure:

"I was coming along the road to Orthez, with my good squire, Chafarote, when in a ravine, about half a league from the village, we heard a noise of bells and the trampling of horses, in the direction of St. Jean de Pied le Port—"

"Of where?"

"Of St. Jean de Pied le Port," repeated the captain, pronouncing the words more distinctly.

"Were they coming thence?"

"They were coming thence."

"Proceed."

"Soon afterwards we descried a group of people—"

cavaliers, pages, squires, and grooms, all armed to the teeth, and escorting a litter—”

“Some lady of quality who was coming to my nuptials.”

“It was indeed a lady ! for when we came within a short distance, a female voice issued from the litter, saying—“Cavalier, come to my rescue, for they are carrying me captive against my will.”

“And when was this ?”

“A few hours ago.”

“And what did you do ?”

“What should I do, but put lance in rest, fix myself firmly in my stirrups, and directing my horse towards him who acted as captain of those people, call to him in a firm tone, and with resolute bearing, ‘Place this damsel, or whoever it may be, immediately at liberty, or you shall have to abide my encounter.’ The answer was not long of coming ; the good knight could not brook such language ; he charged upon me with all his might ; but his horse, which was as big as a dromedary, swerved a little in the onset, and I fairly transfixed him with my lance.

“Did you know him ?”

“Yes.”

“Who was it ?”

“Sancho de Erviti.”

"Ah! Sancho! the friend, the confidant of my mother."

"Well, what of that?"

"Proceed, I entreat you; you have no idea of the horrible things I begin to perceive."

"You may readily suppose," pursued the captain with terrible calmness, "that when the shepherd is slain the sheep are easily scattered, as the priest of our village used to say. The squires, therefore, after a few thrusts from my lance, went wherever they thought fit, only one or two of the ruffians having stopped for a little, to give a pummelling to Chafarote, whom I found terribly mauled after the affray."

"And the lady?"

"I am coming to that. I opened the door of the litter, when I found that I had rescued an unknown person. Don Gaston, I swear to you, by my honour, that to me she was so," added Ximeno, in a serious and solemn tone.—"And not only was she unknown to me, but I discovered that she was a nun. Only fancy to yourself what reward I can hope for, unless it be in the other world! Don't you laugh at the joke, Don Gaston?"

The sarcasm of Ximeno was too bitter, nay, it was

even insulting ; but the son of the countess had his life hanging on Ximeno's lips, and he listened to him like one fascinated. Ximeno might at that moment have not only insulted, but trampled on him with impunity.

"Proceed," he said to him, with tremulous accent.

"The nun confessed to me, at the very outset, that she was not what she seemed—that her nearest relations had wished to bury her in a cell—"

"No more—no more !"

"And that they were carrying her away captive, in order to poison her."

"Great God ! how horrible !"

"Certainly it is a very horrible thing ; but you must know that the relatives of this lady are persons capable of any atrocity ; for, as I have since learned, the elder brother of this poor nun also died of poison at their hands."

"My God ! my God !" exclaimed the youth, in desperation ; "I in love for the first time—"

"Yes, in love with the sister of your mother !" interrupted Ximeno, with all the fury, with all the gall which he had been accumulating within his breast. "And I to deliver her from twice the number of

enemies, in order to bring her to the very shambles to which her enemies were dragging her ?”

“Be consoled, Ximeno, the Queen forgives thee,” said Doña Blanca of Navarre, who, thanks to the care of Ines, had just been restored to consciousness in her arms, and had heard the last words uttered by her doughty champion.

“Oh ! for me there is no pardon ! for me the blessings of heaven are shed abroad in vain,” exclaimed the unhappy Gaston, who seemed utterly annihilated.

Terrible, in truth, was the situation of the ill-fated youth.

He had just begun to feel what is love ; and that too with all the violence with which that passion takes possession of a virgin heart : enveloped in the meshes of an unprincipled intrigue, he was about to be dragged to the altar, to unite his lot to that of a woman he abhorred, when he discovered all at once the inestimable value of his liberty, and the immense sacrifice he was making to his mother’s ambition ; he becomes enamoured of the first object worthy of his love, that his eyes encountered, and learns immediately that that noble object is one on whom is concentrated all the hatred of his family.

It would seem as if Providence, in order to bridle the impulses of his too daring heart, and anticipating that the passions of the young man would easily burst through the bounds which are wont to restrain other men, had designed to strengthen those obstacles with another, new, powerful, and insuperable, by opposing to his desires the barrier of respect, as auxiliary to the fidelity he owed to his betrothed.

Nevertheless, there was still need of one more obstacle—one that cannot be overcome by a loyal and generous heart.

It was a fierce struggle, in which the gods of Olympus, enraged at the youth's sacrilegious and gigantic passion, were forced to throw mountains upon mountains, in order to extinguish his impious flame.

This new obstacle must have arisen if Gaston came to discover the passion of his friend ; but, nevertheless, what efforts must not the latter make to keep it concealed !

Ximeno, the captain of the Free Lances ; Simon the Jew of Mendavia, who, prompted by love for an unknown peasant maiden, and enlightened at the same time by the lamp of faith, abjured the religion of his fathers ; Ximeno, who so often risked his life in defence of the gentle stranger ; Ximeno, who had performed

such prodigies of valour and desperation to become a captain of banditti and then a captain of Free Lances, had just measured with a single word the abyss which separated him from the loadstar of his thoughts, from the only desire of his heart.

“The Queen forgives thee.”

Alas! between the Princess of Viana and the son of Samuel—between the heiress of the throne and the quondam freebooter—there was the same distance as between light and darkness, life and death, the dust of earth and the stars of heaven.

The captain of the Free Lances sometimes suspected not only from the distinguished bearing of the fair peasant, but by her strange adventures, that she did not belong to the humble and despised class among whom she first presented herself to his eyes; but however much he gave the reins to his fancy, he never imagined her to be anything higher than the daughter of one of the inferior nobility. What effect then must not have produced in him the unexpected discovery that the woman to whom he had made love, whom he had treated with so much familiarity, was nothing less than the daughter of a sovereign, his queen and mistress?

“Pardon me, señora, pardon me,” exclaimed Ximeno, prostrating himself before the princess, with-

out daring to raise his eyes and fix them on that august countenance which he had hitherto profaned with his gaze.

"Rise, Ximeno, rise," answered the nun with dignity, and then remarked to him with a melancholy smile; "it is not fit that any one should see at my feet the friend of the countess, him who has more than any other shed the blood of my poor brother's valiant defenders."

This was true; and confounded and annihilated by this truth, the captain of the Free Lances had neither voice to answer nor courage to raise his head.

The princess interpreted his silence unfavourably.

"Thou also, like the rest!" she exclaimed, with bitterness.

Ximeno afflicted at so unjust a suspicion, and wounded to his inmost heart, drew himself up with an expression of indignation; but a moment or two scarce passed when folding his arms he fixed his look on Doña Blanca with deep tenderness, while floods of tears filled his eyes, and with trembling accent he exclaimed, hardly knowing what he said:

"Ximena! Ximena!"

But startled at his own words he added suddenly, with humble and respectful voice:

"Señora, do you not yet know me?"

That look of Ximeno, that tone which echoed from the heart, that reminiscence of happier times, made the princess feel the injustice of her reproach.

"Yes, yes! I understand; forgive me. It was impossible for the noble heart I knew at Mendavia, to be perverted by the tumults of war; it was impossible that he who loved me so much——"

"Hush, hush," said Ximeno, looking with terror at his friend, and stretching his arms towards the princess as if he wished to intercept those words.

Gaston suddenly raised his head as if a viper had stung his bosom; he looked at his friend with moody rage, attempted to speak, but could only utter a sort of howl, rushed to the door, opened it convulsively, and immediately disappeared slamming it with a violence that made the immense corridor resound.

"Fly, leave this," said Ines, in great alarm; "fly quickly! I will go to restrain him."

And that generous soul, who seemed to preserve some glimmerings of life merely to watch over her ungrateful lover, flew in pursuit of the youth as guardian angels fly to arrest the hand of man uplifted for the perpetration of crime.

CHAPTER XIII.

INES did not require to go far. Don Gaston had arrived, he scarcely knew how, at a point where the loud crash of music from the ball-room reached his ears, mingled with the tumult of the revellers, the oaths and exclamations of the pages, and sometimes the animated conversation of lovers who had lost their way in the corridors, and were returning to the hall with glowing cheeks, ungratefully uttering loud curses on the architect for having made the castle a bewildering labyrinth.

The youth paused there as if the society of his fellow-men presented a barrier which he should never attempt to cross; he paused there from instinct—the same instinct which had guided him till that moment.

Ines arrived panting, and agitated with fear lest Gaston, in a fit of jealous rage, might reveal to his mother the place where the princess was to be found.

"Señor," she said, as she approached him, "where are you going?"

"What is that to you?" answered the youth, abruptly.

"Oh! sir, have compassion on an innocent and unfortunate woman! have compassion on the daughter of a hundred kings, who would gladly exchange her lot for that of a peasant's daughter; and respect, above all, the life of a man whose only fault is to have been too generous!"

"And what do you wish me to do?" asked the prince, with a confused air.

"What your noble heart would dictate to you in calmer moments—to conceal from your mother and my mistress the asylum of the lovers. Their life is in your hands."

"You are right," exclaimed Don Gaston, thoughtfully, an idea having, for the first time, occurred to him, which Ines had supposed him not only capable of entertaining, but determined to carry into execution.

"If the success of your passion is impossible, you can at least obtain the glory and consolation of having succeeded in conquering it; and it is some satisfaction to the unhappy to reflect that those who have caused their misery owe to them all their own felicity," pursued the lady, in a tone of deep melancholy.

“ Oh ! but you are under a mistake, Ines, you supposed that I ——”

“ Pardon me, but when I saw you rush from their presence——”

“ From their presence—no. I fly from myself; I fly from this heart which is slighted and disdained by all; I fly—but, Ines, I bear the barbed arrow in my breast, and the more I fly the more deeply does it penetrate. Ines, if you had ever loved you would have compassion on me.”

“ Ah ! yes, I never loved !” replied the damsel, with a smile more sad than the last ray of the sun gilding the skirt of a storm-charged cloud. “ I never loved ! and therefore you see that my cheeks vie in colour and freshness with the roses of spring. I never loved ! and therefore you see happiness beaming in my eyes. I never loved ! and therefore you see my forehead more serene than the bosom of a lake on a summer night. I never loved ! and therefore you see that my eyes do not shed a single tear; that fever does not riot in my veins, and my heart is not consumed with sighs. Ah ! I never loved ! and you therefore see that I, poor flower of a single day, am not about to fall blighted in the morning of life.”

“ You, too ? poor Ines ! But have you ever felt that hell of life called jealousy ?”

"Sir, have you ever been told that you were loved?"

"Never."

"Was love ever revealed to you in soft looks, tender solicitude, delirious transports, intoxicating smiles?"

"Oh! never, never!"

"And, after having drank in those looks, yielded your entire soul up to the whirl of those transports, felt all the soft witchery of that solicitude, and sucked on burning lips the nectar of those smiles—after all this, have you been deluged with gall and bitterness, abandoned in the mire of ignominy, and trampled on by those feet whose prints you could have kissed!"

"Death, death would be preferable to the grief and despair produced by such black ingratitude."

"And have you held in your hands the life of the ingrate?"

"Ah! that I have."

"Has his fate depended on a single step, a single word, a single gesture, a single look of yours?"

"Yes, yes!"

"And you have restrained yourself, sealed your lips, folded your arms, closed your eyes, preserved his life unhurt, in order that another woman may reign without a rival in that idolised heart?"

“ Ines, Ines ! all this now befalls me.”

“ And you have seen him in presence of your proud and triumphant rival ?”

“ Yes.”

“ And you have left them alone, fled from them, carrying with you all their mutual smiles, all their fond looks, all their caresses engraven with fire on your tortured imagination ?”

“ Yes, yes ; there they are, there they are, tasting the delights of which they rob us. Poor Ines ! you also feel, like me, the pangs of jealousy ; but you have not, like me, the Divine curse upon you. For you is reserved the comfort of resignation ; for you the hope of a better life ; and the roots which your grief strikes in this world will cause the tree of your future happiness to spring up and extend its unfading branches in heaven. But I—I who have begun by offending God with an incestuous love, outraging the laws of nature—I, who am descended from blood-stained parents—I, whose first affection is a crime—I must continue in the fatal path into which I am dragged by my destiny. The tree of earthly felicity must remain sterile in my heart.”

“ Heaven is wide, sir, and is open to all. Allow them to escape.”

“ Escape together ! What a difference between

your nature and mine ; you can resign yourself to the loss of him you love : you can console yourself with his happiness. Not so with me. Why has Providence kindled an unsuspected volcano in my heart ? why has it presented that woman to my view before her name should have rendered her to me an object of reverence ? No, I cannot cease to love her ; I cannot consent to my own punishment ; I cannot be my own tormentor ! Allow them to flee ! allow them to enjoy the intoxication of bliss, undisturbed for a single moment by the recollection of our slighted passion."

" You will, you will."

" Ines, whilst we cannot banish them from our minds they will be borne along by the gentle gales of prosperity, transported with bliss, lulled by the dove-like voice of love ; they will dream on in delicious extasy, without ever being startled from their slumbers by the phantom of our despair ; they will never even utter our name, nor bestow a single thought on our misery."

" Peace, for the love of heaven," exclaimed Ines, without raising her sorrowful eyes, which were fixed steadfastly on the ground. " Peace, for you are renewing all my anguish. Oh ! how bitter are your words !"

“ Life can now offer us nothing else than anguish and bitterness.”

“ And they meanwhile—”

The voice of Ines was so hollow and sepulchral that it almost died away in her breast. Gaston moved away several paces.

“ Where are you going?” Ines again asked him, with less terror, with less energy than when she first found him on that spot.

“ Ines, Ines!” exclaimed the prince, “ there are families predestined to crime, and mine is one of them.”

“ But are you going to reveal to the countess—”

Don Gaston said nothing.

“ A base and coward act!” added Ines, recovering her former energy.”

“ No; fear nothing. I will save the princess, but her lover—”

“ Stop, stop!” exclaimed the lady, falling on her knees; but her words and attitude were equally unheeded.

Gaston was already far off on his way to the chamber where the persecuted lovers remained alone.

Ines in vain exerted herself to rise and run after him; the terrible and conflicting sensations which she had experienced left her so weak that she could not stand without supporting herself against the wall.

"Oh!" said the hapless maiden, with Christian resignation, "if they were born for one another, why disturb the designs of Providence?"

In a little she heard slow and heavy footsteps, which the echo repeated through these lonely arcades; it was Gaston silently returning, with his arms folded, in deep dejection.

"What have you done?" asked Ines, trembling.

"I have ascertained that they are fled."

"Great God! are they in safety?"

"No, do not smile so fast; on the contrary, I think they have rushed upon their fate."

"Why?"

"Because my mother has given orders that no one should leave the castle."

"Blessed be God!" exclaimed Ines, and joy seemed to give her new life and light up her pallid countenance. "Blessed be God! Ximeno has a pass—the countess's ring. His life is not now in danger; and I no longer care about losing mine."

At this conjuncture the disdained lovers were startled by a strange noise. The pavement shook, the windows of the gallery trembled, and by degrees was heard the noise of footsteps, the clattering of armour, and even the hoarse accents of warriors,

together with the sharp voice of the countess, who was in eager conversation with them.

"They have cheated us again, Mosen Pierres," said Doña Leonora.

"You have them now in this castle, as surely as Sancho de Erviti is at this moment in hell."

"But do you not see that they make their appearance nowhere?"

"They would be great fools to show their noses if they can keep themselves hid."

"But they must have been quite mad or desperate to come to my very house, when trying to escape from me."

"I know not, Madam, whether they have lost their wits or lost hope; what I have to tell you is this, and I have fallen in myself with the peasants who led the mules, that the brave paladin, the redresser of wrongs, told them to direct their steps to Orthez; and that afterwards, whether from suspicion or caprice, he took it into his head to dismiss them, threatening them with a sound cudgelling if they did not turn back and leave him to himself: the sentinels furnish evidence in accordance with this, asserting that they saw him enter, escorting the litter, and stop in the court."

"Yes, but the litter stands empty in the court,

and the horse of Sancho de Erviti without its rider."

"But, by the blessed Saint Fermin, you must know that as Sancho was left at full length on the field of battle, he could not well come mounted on his own charger."

"But no one has seen either the nun or her deliverer, what is the meaning of that? Good God! has the earth swallowed them up?" exclaimed Doña Leonora impatiently.

"Zounds! no one has seen them, because on a night of nuptial rejoicings no one except the sentinels takes notice of those who come in or go out; and as you had given that unfortunate order that whenever a litter made its appearance—"

"Oh! it must be admitted, constable," said the countess, lowering her voice, "that if my sister has come hither, after such untoward events, God must protect my cause, and his divine will has decreed that I should sit on the throne of Navarre."

"And yet divine providence has placed a good many obstacles before you," replied Mosen Pierres maliciously, awakening bloody reminiscences which made even the countess tremble.

"Now we have only to examine this part of the castle," said Leonora, turning the conversation.

"And here is your son, who may perhaps spare us the trouble of going further."

"Gaston," exclaimed his mother, reproving him with a look for the waywardness of his disposition and his shy behaviour.

The youth, without heeding the reproaches of his mother, addressed Mosen Pierres de Peralta.

"In fact, constable, I can give you full details about what causes you so much uneasiness."

"Ah! you have seen them!" exclaimed the Countess, with ill-dissembled pleasure.

"When I left you, I was very far from suspecting that I was to meet Doña Blanca de Navarre in my old sequestered chamber."

"And the ruffian is really—?" asked Mosen Pierres.

"The captain of Free Lances, Ximeno de Acuña."

"Come, come," said the Countess, advancing a few paces, and then adding with a loud laugh, "I see that being brave does not prevent one from lacking discretion."

"Do not be in a hurry, Madam," replied her son with a composed air. "If you had them in the castle a short while ago, you cannot say as much now."

"How?"

"Because they must be a good long way off by this time."

"Were you really capable, undutiful son?"—screamed the countess, blind with rage.

"Ah, fear nothing from me, I am a son worthy of such a mother; I was not capable of being generous."

"Forgive, forgive me, Gaston my son! but—for heaven's sake, do not jest with your poor mother; tell me where they are—"

"Madam, I have already told you; in the fields, enjoying that liberty which God has given to the birds, the brutes, the winds, and which you would deny to a sister."

"But who is the traitor, who is the villain that was so base as to let them escape?"

And Doña Leonora, in pronouncing these words, rolled her eyes, and turned round on all sides like a basilisk seeking a victim on which to fix its deadly gaze, and repeated with fury—

"Who was so base?"

"You yourself."

"I!"

"You, Madam, you."

"Oh, you are mad! you go too great lengths with your mother; you cruelly mock my anxiety—you wantonly trifle with my heart—"

“Enough! Madam; look if you have on your fingers all the rings you wore a few hours ago.”

“Ah!”

“Reflect, if any one can, by means of that which is wanting, freely enter and quit the castle.”

“So then, Garcés—”

“Garcés! Madam—I know not who is Garcés, but Ximeno—Ximeno de Acuña is the name of him who received the ring from your own hands.”

“Oh, I shall go mad; but Ximeno has accomplices, Ximeno was not alone—I saw a woman with him—Ah! now I remember—Ines, Ines!”

At that moment the Countess observed the anxious maiden leaning against the wall, and listening in terror to the threats of her mistress.

The eyes of the basilisk lighted on the object they were in search of.

“Whatever injury you do to this girl, you do it to me,” said Don Gaston, interfering between the two women. We do not know how far the protection of the countess’s son would have availed Ines; but by good luck there was heard opportunely the clashing of swords, and shouting of combatants, and all the cavaliers composing the escort of the countess rushed with precipitation towards the place from which the sounds proceeded.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE reader, unless he has a treacherous memory, will recollect that we have more than once indicated the contradiction which existed between the language of the captain of the Free Lances and that of the countess and her son in reference to the famous invitation to the wedding ; and although, as regards the stress to be laid on words, we ought perhaps rather to lean towards those uttered by the royal family, our monarchical principles must excuse us if on the present occasion we incline to think that the son of a Jew may speak the truth as well as the son of a king. Nevertheless, as when one affirms and another denies, there is necessarily either error or falsehood somewhere, we shall first, leaving the evil-disposed to investigate eagerly where lies the falsehood, try to ascertain if there could have been any mistake in the matter.

The reverses sustained by the Beamontese fac-

tion in Navarre, and their auxiliaries in Catalonia, had left the Count de Lerin extremely discontented and out of humour. He complained, with reason, of the simplicity of the Count de Pallars in laying aside his arms, while Louis the King of France was playing the part of mediator between the rebellious Catalans and their friends the Castellians on the one hand, and the monarch of Navarre and Arragon on the other.

The arbitration turned out exactly as the Constable had anticipated; for the sentence of the astute Louis the Eleventh was a matter long arranged beforehand with one of the parties, and did not in the least take the Count de Lerin by surprise.

He knew that the French monarch projected an alliance with King Juan by means of a matrimonial union between his sister Madeleine and the latter's grandson. He assumed also that Louis the Eleventh was not the man to engage in any affair from which he did not expect to derive honour or profit; and as no honour could redound to him from the marriage of his sister to the son of a feudal count, and no profit either, the Princess de Foix having an elder sister who was legitimate heir to the throne of Navarre, he came to the conclusion that the King of France calculated with all imaginable certainty that the

Princess of Viana would not inherit the crown, and that it would come, after the removal of that important obstacle, to Don Gaston de Foix, his future son-in-law.

These premises being settled, the impartiality of the umpire becomes perfectly obvious; on the one hand were the people of Catalonia, with whom he was not connected by any bond whatever, and on the other Don Juan, with his own daughter Madeleine in the background. The French monarch was certainly excusable if he decided that the Castellians, who had come to the assistance of the Catalonian rebels, should without any delay evacuate the principality; that the Navarrese should pay to Don Juan a certain sum of money, sufficient doubtless to meet satisfactorily the expenses of the nuptials; and that the Catalans should return to their allegiance; in exchange for all which there was promised them an ample and generous pardon for the past, which was not likely to extend to those whose heads the king might take a fancy to see under the axe of the executioner.

Those who could find no excuse with the count were the poor lambs who had placed their honour and their goods in the claws of the lion.

But the stern justice and scrupulous impartiality

of Louis the Eleventh did not stop here ; for bringing to light certain old parchments, almost devoured by moths, he proved by irrefragable arguments that as France laid out considerable sums in aiding to slay one of our kings, called by her Pedro the Cruel, but by the Spanish people Pedro the Just, the province of Guipúscoa should be annexed to the French crown by way of indemnification, with which Louis professed to be quite satisfied, making us a present of his fees as arbiter, and not asking a single farthing for the costs of the process.

The Spaniards, a people naturally gallant and proud, gave good reasons for rejecting so generous an offer, and answered the Frenchman that his sentence was sufficient evidence of his absolute disinterestedness and unheard-of self-denial ; and, as regards the parchments, he might roll them carefully up again, and fumigate them if he chose, in order that the moths might not commit further damage,—which would be a matter of regret, because the soul of Beltran Claquin, the assassin of Don Pedro, could not enjoy eternal repose if such invaluable documents were lost or destroyed.

These and other suppositions were, to the Count de Lerin, soon converted into positive evidence, when he heard of the preparations for the marriage, which were then making in the castle of Orthez ; and

taking his measures, in order to get at the whole truth, he likewise ascertained that the Princess of Viana was to be transferred to Orthez, and placed directly under the power of her cruel sister, as a necessary condition for the marriage of the nephew.

The astute count was walking up and down in the room formerly described in his castle at Mendavia, meditating on the steps he should take for the purpose of aiding Doña Blanca in the terrible calamity that was about to befall her.

It was difficult to enter with armed men into the states of Bearne, and even, although he should venture on an incursion, besides being mad and hazardous, it was also a useless undertaking, because he did not know the when and the how, nor from whence the queen was to be removed; and it was a still greater act of insanity to try an assault or surprise on the castle of Orthez, which was now filled with an extraordinary concourse of brave and renowned warriors.

The Count de Lerin was not a man who required to brood long and painfully on any subject. After a few minutes of reflection, there appeared on his lips a smile, the harbinger of a happy thought, or an exquisitely diabolical device.

On this occasion, he not only smiled, but arched

his eyebrows, slapped his forehead, rubbed his hands, and said, with a certain satisfaction which, as he was alone, he did not require to dissemble, as was his wont,—

“Certainly, I was very stupid not to have stumbled sooner on such an idea;—Ferrando,” he called aloud.

The rubicund page immediately made his appearance.

“What are your commands, sir?”

“Come here, you young rogue:—among all the rabble of pages who devour my substance, who is the boldest, and, above all, the most cunning?”

“Sir,” answered Fernando, with no small pretension, “I think no one can dispute with me the supremacy, in those noble qualities.”

“Magnificent! and your answer proves it. Let us see;—will you venture to pass into the service of the Princes de Foix, my natural enemies?”

“Sir, let your highness order me to throw myself headlong down those rocks, which serve as a foundation to your castle, but not to leave your house.”

“And if it were only for a stratagem?”

“In that case, if it be your pleasure”—

“Well, then, I am going to order for you a red and white livery.”

"The colours of the Count de Foix?"

"Precisely. I shall also get made for you a heraldic coat, with their arms richly embroidered; on one shield we shall put, in a field gules, two bulls, seven bezants, and a castle on a bridge argent."

"The arms of the Count de Foix, Prince of Bearne, and Baron of Moncada."

"Bravo! Ferrando," exclaimed the Count de Lerin, "you display a heraldic learning which I did not look for in such a youth. On the left side we shall place a shield, with the chains of Navarre and the bloody bars of Arragon."

"Of course, for the house of Foix, having formed connexions with the princes of the blood,—"

"It is plain there can be no impropriety in putting a royal crown over their armorial bearings. Very well; as soon as the embroiderer has finished his work, you shall don this finery;—you shall choose two other squires, who resemble you in roguery, and when mounted, you on my horse and they on sturdy mules, you shall go the Bárdenas —"

"Sir!"

"What! do you begin to hark back?"

"And the banditti?"

"The banditti will respect you, because you are

going as the herald of the Count de Foix to the captain of the band."

"And if they discover the trick and flay me alive?"

"The thing is this," said the count, fixing his eagle eyes on the page, "as I have initiated you so far into my secrets, you must either acquit yourself with honour in this undertaking or be flayed alive—by me if you refuse to perform it, or by the captain if you bungle the business."

"Sir, I shall defer imitating Saint Bartholomew as long as I possibly can."

"You go to the Bârdenas," pursued he of Lerin, with an inflexible air ; "you present yourself to the captain of the Free Lances, and you say to him—Noble captain, the high and illustrious princes of Foix and Bearne have commissioned me to convey to you their wish and earnest entreaty that you should comply with their desire, which is no other than to do them the high honour of assisting at the marriage of their well-beloved son, Don Gaston, with Mademoiselle Madeleine, sister to the King of France, in which they will consider themselves much honoured, and I not less so at having executed their message, to my great glory and their great pleasure."

"Sir, the lesson seems rather too long for me to keep it in memory."

"Nevertheless, remember how the Count de Lerin treats the foolish and indiscreet, and I am sure you will not need another repetition to enable you to execute the embassy without omitting a single jot. And, by-the-by, it will not be amiss for me to select the squires who are to accompany you, in order that I may know something about your punctuality, diligence, and good memory." And with a severe gesture, the Constable of Navarre dismissed the rubicund page.

The latter went away as usual, pale and agitated, saying internally :—

"What a terrible man is the Count de Lerin ! When he is most jocular and familiar with you, he all at once shows his claws, and, from under the sheep-skin the lion glares out."

"Well," said the count, renewing his promenade, "Doña Blanca of Navarre must be in the castle of Orthez the day of the marriage ; the captain of the Free Lances is incapable of neglecting the polite message of the prince and princess ; the captain is desperately in love with the queen, without knowing her ; it is very likely that they may see one another there, and much more, that when he sees her the

bandit will show some of his tricks. Magnificent ! In the first place, I deprive the Agramontese of their best lance, with a hundred others ; and, without costing me a farthing, they all pass over, soul and body, to my party. And who knows but that the exploits of the captain will be so extraordinary, that the Queen Doña Blanca, may in some strange manner be restored to us. Whether or no, we shall take good care to place near the castle of Orthez some of her good friends and loyal servants. Let us go, for to seize a good opportunity is better than to gain a battle."

And after such cogitations, he left the apartment to arrange measures for carrying his design into effect.

Our readers have been enabled in the foregoing narration to see how well devised were the plans of the Count de Lerin ; and in the future course of our story, they will see whether his calculations as to gaining over the captain of the Free Lances, and rescuing the princess, were equally well founded.

CHAPTER XV.

THE Chronicle relates that the Princess of Viana, as soon as she found herself alone with the captain of the Free Lances, began to tremble ; but the Chronicle does not tell us whether it was from love, cold, or fear.

The terrible strait in which she was placed could hardly fail to produce that effect. So near her pitiless enemies, without being able to remain an instant longer in Don Gaston's apartment, from which the jealous and irritated youth had just hurried, perhaps with hostile designs ; without any possibility of escape—for Leonora, now informed of her arrival, would doubtless have doubled the guards and sentinels, to prevent her exit ; afraid to venture through those corridors and galleries, because, now forced to quit the most retired part of the castle, wherever else she might go, she would probably meet with persons who would not fail to betray her ; and unable to hide herself in the crowd, and escape notice

among the other guests, on account of her monastic dress.

Oh ! how deeply did she then regret that she was not born in a straw-covered cabin ! how she sighed for the freedom of a humble condition ; how she longed for the harbour at Mendavia, and her white kerchief, her russet gown, and the dusky fleece on polished distaff

“ Let us leave this, señora ; let us not lose an instant,” said the captain to her.

“ But where, where can we fly to ? ”

“ God will protect us.”

“ Alas, alas ! ” exclaimed Blanca, in great agitation ; “ if Gaston discloses my retreat to the countess, who will rescue me from death, who will wrest me from the power of my implacable sister ? ”

“ Señora, remember that I am still in existence ; forgive me, Princess, if I have still the boldness to think of serving you.”

“ Ah ! it is now impossible, Ximeno. I must resign myself to die ; and as no woman on earth can be more unhappy than I am, quitting life must cost me less than any other.”

“ Impossible ! impossible for me to save you ! ” exclaimed Ximeno, with tenderness and resolution.

“ Señora, give me leave to save you.”

"Oh yes! you are my only friend, and I must throw myself entirely in your arms!"

"But recollect that my arms are those of the son of a Jew."

"They are the arms of Ximeno."

"Thanks, Señora; come with me. I feel I have strength and courage enough to save you against the whole world. Come, here is a cloak and a hat which must belong to Don Gaston; disguise yourself with them. Well: lean on my arm. Don't tremble, Señora; don't be afraid; for God would not have caused me to discover you in so extraordinary a manner, if I were to be the means of bringing you to an untimely end."

Uttering these words, suppressing others of a more tender description, and practising what he had recommended, Ximeno left the chamber, supporting the imperfectly-disguised princess with his right arm, while his left hand grasped the hilt of his sword, which he was determined to draw on the slightest appearance of danger.

The persecuted lovers paused at the threshold of the door, not only to see if any one observed them, but to consider as to the direction which they ought to take, and which could be no other than that which they did take.

Fortunately for them the most profound silence reigned, and a few lamps, placed at intervals, afforded but a scanty light to the deserted corridors.

There was only heard, in the distance, the hollow din of the festivities, and the howling of the wind amid the turrets and loopholes of the castle.

"This way," said Ximeno.

"No; on this side," replied the princess.

"To the right."

"I think it must be to the left."

"I don't know; I came here so abstracted."

"So did I; the delight at seeing myself in safety—and saved by you!"

"Señora, for the love of God, do not increase my confusion by such reminiscences. That I should myself have brought you hither, to the place where they were plotting your death!"

"And what matters it now to me, if I believe you innocent? It would have been bitter, indeed, to die, saying, I do not leave in the world I am quitting a single person that did not deceive me."

"Come, come, in God's name, let us venture on some way or other. I feel at this moment so much confidence in divine Providence that they all seem equal to me; they will all lead to your salvation."

"Although you say that, Ximeno, as if you

believed it, as if God inspired you, I feel you tremble !”

“ Oh ! who would not tremble beside you, Ximena ?”

“ Let us proceed ; ah ! let us proceed. I wish to live.” And with short and faltering steps, the now almost happy pair slowly advanced, sometimes amid the wished-for obscurity, and at others before the light so hateful to them.

Suddenly the captain felt a pressure on his arm, accompanied by a shake.

“ Do you hear steps !” the princess asked him ?

“ No.”

“ I do ; there can be no doubt of it.”

“ This infernal casque stops my ears ! and in what direction ?”

“ Hush !”

“ Let us hide ourselves here in the shadow.”

“ The reflection of your armour will betray you.”

“ No matter ; here I will see at a distance whoever comes ; and, if necessary, I can attack him on a sudden, and with advantage.”

The steps which echoed through the corridor were those of two servants who came talking together, and were doubtless occupied in the discharge of some mission from their mistress.

They checked their speed a little, and one said to the other, pulling him by the sleeve :—

“Hark, Fermin, do you not descry there, at the bottom of the corridor, near the passage to the tower, as it were two bulky objects, one of which throws off something like sparks ?”

“It seems to me, Juan, that you have the sparks in your noddle, produced by the wine of Peralta, which is flowing about as plentiful as water in these days of revelling.”

“No ; say what you will, the bulky objects are there, and more, by token, they are now in movement.”

“Even if it should be so,” answered Fermin, to his timorous companion, “surely there is nothing strange in our seeing such things in these places, when the house is chock full of people.”

“Certainly, there is nothing particular in it.”

“Look,—they have disappeared.”

“I think they have.”

“And yet you shrink.”

“I confess I feel as if my feet were of lead.”

“But what is the meaning of all this ?”

“Hum.”

“Deuce take it, you must not pester me with your apprehensions, for—”

“Why?”

“Because you will make me as great a coward as yourself; and, remember, we have to execute the orders of the countess —”

“Confound her orders;—to go down, at this time of the night, to the vaults, place an additional padlock on the secret door, and remain there as fixtures, to prevent the bridegroom himself,—the very prince in person, from passing! Whims of a capricious woman. Who the devil would ever think of going out now by that false door, through a storehouse of cobwebs, and a preserve of bats?”

“Bats?”

“Yes, man, yes, but you seem also to shrink.”

“I hold these little monsters, so help me God, in great horror. Ever since I knew that the Jewish witch, devil take her, is changed every night into one of these unclean beasts —”

“Ho, ho! so you are also thinking of the witch Rachel?”

“What,—you were —?”

“Look you;—scarcely did I notice those large objects, looming and glimmering in the darkness, when it at once entered into my head that that diabolical wretch was not far off.”

“Hush, Juan, hush! — those phantoms have

just glided past here, and we must speak more politely."

"Where?"

"Here;—but zounds! don't turn your head, let us give them a wide berth."

"Why do you cough?"

"I can't tell—perhaps the cold draught —"

"These are absurd caprices of the countess; but what can we expect when she shows so much friendship, so much attention, and all that to a Jewess, who is older than Methusalem, and who has more of the witch than the saint about her."

"She does quite right."

"How?—you too! bad Christian that you are —"

"One taper to God, and two to the devil."

The fugitive lovers had listened with alarm to the above conversation, and from some fragments which reached them, they inferred that they inspired at least as much fear as they themselves experienced.

The heart of Kimeno throbbed violently on hearing the name of Rachel, as did Blanca's when she heard that of the countess.

They were encouraged by the good fortune which enabled them to escape the first obstacle; and more and more confirmed in the belief that they ought to continue in the same direction, they proceeded reso-

lutely along the corridor, and, to their surprise, soon found themselves in a gallery hung with tapestry.

This circumstance, and that of hearing the sounds of festivity nearer, convinced them that they were now in the inhabited portion of the castle, and consequently not far from the principal entrance, by which Ximeno, in possession of the countess's ring, expected to make his exit, without any opposition or difficulty.

Now was arrived the critical moment to find whether the armour of the captain and the garments of the nun, but scantily concealed by the Don Gaston's cloak, would attract the notice of the passers by. Fortunately, her clothes were black,—the same colour as the cloak,—and whether from this circumstance, or because the people whom they now began to meet were in haste, and their thoughts occupied with their own affairs, no one said a word to the anxious pair, nor even directed a single glance at them.

Encouraged with their first good fortune, the captain almost thought of asking for information as to where was the principal entrance to the castle ; but he did not venture, for fear of exciting suspicion, and he determined to follow the first pair, who, wrapt up in their cloaks, should retire from the ball for their hotel, as he was certain that they would take the most

direct road to the door, and that which, if followed by the lovers, would be least likely to raise suspicion.

While they were communicating these thoughts to each other in a whisper, the princess felt a somewhat stronger pressure than that which she had given a few minutes before to the captain.

“What is it?”

Ximeno answered not a word.

“What is the matter?” repeated Blanca.

Ximeno still kept silence; but pushing her not very gently, he made her conceal herself behind the tapestry, and in the embrasure of a window, in the centre of which, fortunately for her, two curtains met.

“But, good heavens, what is the matter?” again asked Doña Blanca, in amazement.

“Silence!” said the captain, placing the bars of his visor against the princess’s ear, “Do you hear that voice?”

“Yes, a woman’s voice.”

“It is the countess.”

“My sister!”

“Silence, for the love of God, and be calm.”

“Oh! we are lost.”

“No, no. trust in God,” said the captain, grasping

his sword-hilt convulsively, "do you see that piece of sky-blue brocade which falls a little below the curtain?"

"Yes, yes."

"It is the skirt of her mantle."

The princess was petrified.

Nevertheless, a moment afterwards, whether from female curiosity, or the force of natural affection, or both combined, Doña Blanca tried to separate the curtains a little, and take a peep.

"What are you doing?" said Ximeno, in terror, and seizing her by the arm.

"Ah! permit me, I am going to look at my sister."

"But such imprudence may cost you your life."

"Allow me, I have never seen her, and she is my sister."

"No, she is not your sister, she is your executioner, she is a tigress thirsting for your blood."

"Ah!" we have been rocked in the same cradle," replied Doña Blanca, with tender accents, placing her forehead close to the tapestry.

Although the visual rays could pass freely through an opening between the two pieces of the tapestry, the princess could scarcely gratify her affectionate curiosity as much as she desired,

for the tears, gathering in her eyes, dimmed her sight.

"Oh! how beautiful she is, and how strongly do I feel impelled to rush out and throw myself in her arms," said the princess, wiping her gushing tears, which she was quite unable to restrain.

"If you did, she would strangle you in her embrace."

"You are right, those very arms have already strangled my poor brother, but at this moment I do not wish to hear such language."

While this was passing in the embrasure of the window, the countess was conversing in the apartment in a very different style with Mosen Pierres de Peralta.

"Constable," she said, "I cannot believe what you tell me; but whether it is so or not, let us search the whole house, and leave no stone unturned. Oh! such a mishap would be my ruin, my utter perdition; and I cannot, will not submit to it."

"You do well, and you would act still better, if you gave immediate orders prohibiting even a fly from leaving the castle."

"Oh! that is done already."

"Well, then, let us undertake a scrupulous examination throughout the castle, beginning here."

"Alone?"

"Alone; I vow to Barabbas, I am a match, and more than a match, for a nun and a devil."

"Nevertheless this devil has engaged a whole legion, and you know what account he has given of them. To me it appears more advisable to find the cavaliers who are in our confidence, and who have returned from your useless expedition, and if they are sufficiently numerous, we shall divide ourselves into two parties, in order to fall in with my sister as soon as possible."

"Have you ever known her?"

"Never."

"I much fear that if you come to know her, your acquaintance with her will be very short."

"Pshaw!"

Doña Leonora, in uttering that exclamation, shrugged her shoulders, knitted her brows, and smiled in so frightful a manner, that she struck Mosen de Peralta dumb; and the captain divining her gesture by the tone of her voice, felt his veins on fire, and the princess became rigid with terror.

The two former departed, and Ximeno, wishing to take an opposite path, seized the queen by the hand, and in the glowing iron of his he felt such a chill as would be produced by grasping an icicle.

“Señora?”

The princess said nothing.

“Ximena, my Ximena! take courage; my God, my God! at such a time!”

“Open, open that window, for heaven’s sake; I feel as if I were dying,” muttered the princess with feeble voice.

Ximeno opened the casement with the least noise possible.

The night was dark, the sky veiled in dense black clouds, and the wind howled in the lofty battlements of the castle, while the atmosphere was much milder than might have been expected at that inclement season.

On opening the window, the captain directed his eyes to the paved court below, and by the light of several torches, saw the servants of the countess examining the litter. There could be no doubt that that was the principal court; the entrance of the castle was in one of its sides; the staircase must lead to the tapestried gallery, and if fortune continued to favour them two minutes longer, as she had hitherto done, the lovers would be free, thanks to the talisman with which the countess had furnished them.

"Courage, courage, Ximena! I now know where we are—we have but a few yards more to go," exclaimed the captain, turning to the princess.

The pure air restored her to animation, and the consoling words of Ximeno refreshed her heart with the breath of hope.

Blanca felt she had strength enough to walk; she cautiously put out her head; the gallery was deserted. they set off, they found the staircase, they descended to the court, and left behind them the pages and squires busied about the litter and Sancho de Erviti's horse. After the court they had to cross an immense arched portico; on the right there was a door, which gave entrance to the apartments of the seneschal, and another on the left with the guard-house; before the latter, and around a blazing fire, a group of soldiers were warming themselves, and near them were two enormous mastiffs gnawing bones and devouring offal.

"Who goes there?" cried the sentinel, with a brandified voice.

"Friends."

"Back!"

"I tell you that we are friends—that we belong to

the house, that we have the countess's pass," said Ximeno, gradually advancing.

"Back, back !"

The mastiffs began to growl at hearing the cries of the sentinel.

"Oh," said Ximeno to himself, "as to this knave I think I could come to an understanding with him, but those cursed dogs might fly at the princess's throat. Brother sentinel," he added aloud, "I do not know why you will not allow me to pass freely, when I bear the countess's own signet."

"No one can pass here who does not know the watchword."

"But observe that the signet of the countess has greater authority."

"Zounds ! back, if you don't wish me to let the dogs loose upon you, or to let fly at you with my cross-bow."

"I will not resist, I see that you are a good soldier and a faithful servant of the countess ; but have the kindness to call the governor and you will see how he will immediately give orders to let us out."

"Hilloa, Maniroto !" cried the relentless sentinel without stirring from the spot, "go and tell the governor that he is wanted here."

A soldier left the fire and disappeared by the door on the right.

"Oh ! there is no help for it," said Ximeno, if the governor comes and sees you in these nun's garments he will know us and we are lost ; I must speak to him alone, so that he may not see you, and perhaps I may be able to extort from him the order for both. Remain here a little, in the shadow behind this pillar," said the captain, who had retreated back to the court.

"Are you going to leave me alone ?"

"For a few moments."

"Am I to be separated from you ?"

"There is no help for it."

"Oh !"

"What is the matter ?"

"Cruel presentiments."

"Hope in God, Señora."

"I have long hoped in vain. O let us not separate, let us die together !"

"Die !"

"Ah, you are right. You must not die. I am mad to think of infecting you with my unhappiness."

"Oh say not that, when we are compelled to separate, even though but for a moment."

“Well then, if we must separate, in case we see one another for the last time, I will tell you that I love you.”

“Oh, Doña Blanca !”

“Doña Blanca, yes, the same as Ximena.”

“Ho, cavalier,” shouted a soldier, here is the governor.”

CHAPTER XVI

XIMENO turned his head, assuming at the same time a valiant air, and saw not far from him a little squat, fresh-coloured, chubby-cheeked man, dressed in a profusion of showy garments and finery, and masticating with great good will. His protuberant waist and inflamed eyes might serve as a thermometer, to indicate the stage the supper had reached at the time of interruption. His meek character and pacific expression immediately tranquilized the captain, and inspired him with courage.

"What does your worship require?" asked the governor, wiping his shining lips with his sleeve.

"To leave this."

"And you have the watchword?"

"No."

"Then I return to supper, and you to the ball; and I hope you will excuse me for not allowing you to pass. I am very sorry; but the orders are very

strict. I don't know who the deuce can be in the castle. I have been at supper three hours, and have been obliged to get out more than twenty times. These interruptions are very hurtful on such occasions! I shall certainly have an indigestion to-night!"

"So then, none but those who have the watchword—"

"None. If you will honour my poor table—I have not yet reached the desert, and—"

"But, my friend, what if I should show you something better than the watchword?"

"Better?"

"Yes."

"It would be difficult for you to shew me anything that would inspire more confidence, unless it were an impression of my master's signet."

"Better still."

"Better there cannot be."

"The very ring itself which stamps the impression."

"And have you it indeed?"

"Look there."

The governor took it into his hands, and after having observed it attentively for a few seconds,

took off his cap, and said with profound respect and wonder:—

“But, then, who is your highness? Why does your excellency tarry?”

“So, then, I may pass freely?”

“Who doubts it, sir, who doubts it? It is true that my mistress, the countess, told me not to allow a soul to go out, unless he could repeat a certain watchword; but it would be an indiscretion, it would be sacrilege not to show honour and respect to her own arms.”

“Very well, my friend,” said Ximeno, with visible agitation, “I relied confidently on this, and therefore, I have had patience to wait;” and then he proceeded with a patronizing air, “it gives me pleasure to see, sir governor, how well you fulfil your duties. Of course my squire can pass freely, as well as myself?”

“Who doubts it, sir? when he accompanies your excellence.”

“It is clear there can be no difficulty.”

“None whatever.”

“Well, give orders to the sentinel, and I will return immediately.”

The captain, overjoyed at his success, returned to

the court with rapid steps, approached the pillar, and in an agitated whisper called —

“Ximena, Ximena !”

Doña Blanca was not there.

He walked round the pillar ; and fearing he had made a mistake, he went round several others.

The princess had disappeared.

His blood rushed to his head ; he felt a sense of suffocation, accompanied with a strange buzzing in his ears, acute pangs at his heart, disturbed vision, and broken respiration.

One of the squires of Sancho de Erviti, who had survived the catastrophe, and who brought to the castle the sad news of his master's death, had observed the fugitives in the tapestried gallery ; kept close in their track, prepared to denounce them aloud if the sentinel did not oppose their transit ; but when he saw the princess alone, he judged that a better opportunity could not be found for getting possession of her.

This or some such calamity the captain supposed must have happened. But where was Doña Blanca ? What direction had she taken ?

It was necessary that Ximeno should know this, and to know it he must enquire ; and now it did not

concern him much, although the enquiry should cost him his life.

He was about to put authoritative questions on the subject to the pages and squires around the litter, and to call aloud to his Ximena, when he heard sounds of lamentation issuing from the further end of a corridor. The voice of sorrow was to him the announcement of happiness.

He rushed in the direction of those cries of distress, which as he advanced were more easily recognized. After the exclamations of grief, he heard confused sounds of masculine voices, and then the noise of short and hurried steps, and then,—Oh, then he could see the princess in the midst of a group of armed men, who were dragging her along, and endeavouring to drown her cries with the din of their voices.

The captain did not count his enemies before falling on them sword in hand ; he recked not though he had an army before him.

“ Away, caitiffs,” he said to them, “ away, cowards, who employ base devices to get possession of a poor woman. Away, traitors, for you have here to do with one who is accustomed to rescue her.”

Rage nerved his arm with additional strength ; his

blows were rapid and effective, and not one of them was thrown away.

His opponents turned upon him, and they were so many in number that they gradually drove the captain into a corner. In the angle of the gallery he was obliged to confine himself to the defensive, and this he could not long maintain, since, as might be expected, the hostile phalanx continued to increase as the noise of the affray reached the ears of the other inmates of the castle.

The circle which the captain's blade traced around him, was becoming narrower and narrower, while the hostile wall which separated him from the princess increased in strength ; and in spite of the advantages which his armour and his valour gave him, there was no help for it ; he must succumb in the struggle.

Nevertheless, he did not succumb.

In the rear of those who were bearing off the princess there gleamed a sword, brandished by an arm of iron, which dealt upon them frequent and furious blows.

" Cowards ! so many against one," shouted the new-comer, panting with fatigue, doubtless because he had just come after exerting his utmost speed.

The countess's people turned round at this

unexpected and marvellous reinforcement ; and, strange to say, no one returned his blows ; all turned the point of their swords to the ground, and made way for him respectfully.

It was Gaston, who had now the good fortune of being able to show himself as brave and generous in regard to Ximeno as the latter had been to him in the Bárdenas on a similar occasion.

They embraced one another, and without losing a moment, they ran together to Doña Blanca, and removed her from among the crowd.

Guided by de Foix, the two lovers ascended and descended stairs, passed and repassed corridors in order that their enemies might lose scent of them ; and at length they found themselves, to their no small astonishment, in the very room which they had quitted.

They secured the doors with keys and bolts ; and Doña Blanca, prostrated with fatigue, and breathing with difficulty, seated herself in a chair ; but even this repose was not allowed her, for, in a short time, a terrible knocking was heard at the door, accompanied by the voice of the countess calling on her son.

"It is evident," exclaimed Ximena, "God does not wish me to live. Do not trouble yourselves ; open, I must resign myself to my fate."

“Not yet,” said Gaston, “for you there is still consolation above, and hope on earth ;” and opening a secret door, which communicated by a stair, with the wall of the castle, he gave her a key, saying, with tenderness,

“Adieu, princess. You can go forth with your deliverer ; remember that all those who remain in the castle of Orthez are not your enemies.”

“Gaston, this is the first and the last time that we shall see one another ; have you not an embrace for me ?”

“Oh !” ejaculated Don Gaston, throwing himself in her arms, and straining her to his bosom.

Thus they remained a few moments. The knocking at the door was redoubled. The cries of the countess became more violent.

The captain suffered a thousand torments. But Don Gaston, who had enjoyed a moment of happiness, thought that his soul was torn out of his body, when he reluctantly unclasped himself from the arms of Doña Blanca.

For a single instant he wavered in his resolution ; for a single instant the idea of the happiness he might enjoy beside the princess passed through his imagination ; but with an effort he conquered his weak-

ness, and repeated with sorrowful accent, "Adieu, adieu for ever."

Doña Blanca left the apartment.

Ximeno was in the act of following his beloved; but Don Gaston suddenly detained him, and said, with a hollow and deeply agitated voice, "Ximeno, my friend Ximeno, forgive me the grief I feel at tearing myself from her arms and consigning her to yours?"

The captain of the Free Lancers squeezed his hand, and followed the princess.

The secret entrance was closed at the same time that the principal door fell unhinged upon the floor, burst open by the powerful shoulders of Mosen Pierres de Peralta.

"You were very fast asleep, Don Gaston," said the Countess de Foix, as she entered, casting around the piercing glances of the lurking tigress; "and in truth so profound a lethargy raised great alarm in my maternal heart."

"And was it from the effects of impatience?" replied Don Gaston, his back turned to the secret door, and not daring to move a single step. "Was your taking my chamber by assault the effect of your disquietude?"

“To what other cause can it be ascribed? These cavaliers are witnesses of the alarm I felt when I heard that you remained *alone* — entirely *alone* — after some affray or other of which they have spoken to me.”

“Were you afraid that some misfortune might befall me, when you came accompanied by so many cavaliers — armed cavaliers too?” added Don Gaston, pointing out Sancho de Erviti’s squire, whose armour was bespattered with blood.

“You left us with such precipitation that, before we could overtake you, you had decided the battle; and immediately after the victory to go and bury yourself in these *solitudes* seems to me the very excess of modesty. But the modesty of a son does not satisfy the pride of a mother. This room, besides, is too dreary and sequestered; it has, you must be aware, dangerous communications with the external part of the castle, and therefore,” added the countess, with a haughty smile, which contrasted with the softness of her tones, “in order that you might fear nothing from the numerous evil-doers who wander about in these parts, I have ordered an additional padlock to be placed on the door which is at the foot of the stair.”

“Heavens!”

"At what are you alarmed?"

"Who has that key?"

"I."

"You!"

"In what hands can it be more safe than in those of a mother?"

"Ah! I see you know all; you have heard all."

"Your language alarms me, and you make me suspect that you have been threatened with some danger in these secret passages."

"No; however much you may dissemble, you know all, mother; but you must also know the duties of hospitality."

As he uttered these words, Don Gaston gradually approached the small door, as if desirous of placing a wall between the fugitives and their pursuers.

"I confess that your words are a mystery to me; but the heart of a mother, the instinct of her love, warns her of some calamity. Get away; I wish to satisfy myself with my own eyes."

Doña Leonora advanced a few paces towards the door.

Gaston remained motionless.

"Give way, I command you."

"No, I cannot obey you."

"Open immediately," replied the countess authoritatively.

"Never!" again repeated Gaston.

"Ho! there, cavaliers, servants, remove from that place a disobedient son."

Don Gaston then bared his sword, and replied with firmness—

"Whoever dares to advance a single step must measure swords with me."

"All the cavaliers drew their swords.

Doña Leonora then remembered that she was a mother, and, seeing her son threatened by so many enemies, exclaimed, as she placed herself before the generous youth,

"There is no necessity for shedding a single drop of blood. The padlock will not be easily broken: there are, besides, two sentinels on the outside—it is impossible for the fugitives to escape by the postern-gate."

"They will go out by the principal gate," cried Ximeno, throwing open the secret door with a crash. "Back, back, vile knaves," he shouted again with wrathful voice, brandishing aloft his tremendous sword.

So soon as the daring captain appeared on the threshold of the door, all the cavaliers drew back a

step, quite unable to repress that involuntary movement of surprise.

His gigantic stature; the temper of his armour; the imposing echo of his voice, which quivered with indignation; his impetuosity; his firmness; and above all, the great fame of his formidable blows and extraordinary prowess, which extended far beyond the narrow limits of the diminutive kingdom of Navarre, justified the sudden effect produced by his presence.

When the cavaliers recovered from their first alarm, they would have attacked the bold adventurer altogether, or one by one, impelled by the voice of their honour, which was tainted by that single instant of vacillation, if they had not seen the son of the countess place himself at the side of the famous paladin, who, pressing his friend's hand warmly in his gauntletted grasp, said to him—

“Don Gaston, leave me, for I must singly open myself a passage with the point of my sword through those discourteous knights, who dare to draw their swords against the defender of a lady.”

“No,” answered Don Gaston, his countenance still lighted up with love and anger; “although the reward of victory be entirely yours, you must share the danger with me.”

“Do you not see?—they dare not raise their sword

because you are before me. Quit my side, Don Gaston, leave me alone, and you will see how they will spring upon me like greyhounds on the wild boar of the mountains."

"I will never abandon the defence of my guest."

"The result of this, Don Gaston, is that you prevent my escape. There you see they stand motionless, with their arms extended, like the beeches of the Pyrenees! Leave me then, or I will force them to their defence with my sword."

"It seems to me more prudent to avail ourselves of the respect and consideration they bear me, and that you and Doña Blanca, guarded by me, should leave this inhospitable mansion."

This proposal was not made by Don Gaston in so low a voice but that it reached the ears of the countess de Foix, who became greatly alarmed at the aspect which the adventure was assuming. This was to her a critical moment of doubt and anxiety; if she allowed her cavaliers to attack the intrepid captain, they could not do so with impunity, not only from the strength and desperate valour of the paladin, but because he was clad in complete armour; whilst the others, who were not prepared for battle but for nuptial ceremonies and festivities, were dressed in the finest cloths and costliest brocades. The enemy could also

count upon the defence of Don Gaston ; and a mother could not give the signal of attack for a struggle in which her own son might perish.

On the other hand if Ximeno had determined to follow the advice of his friend, it was not to be doubted that, under shadow and protection of the latter, the princess and he would leave the castle without opposition.

What was the countess to do in this dilemma ?— by adopting the former alternative, she would expose the life of Don Gaston to imminent hazard, and by resigning herself to take the other course, she would frustrate, in one instant, the ambitious hopes of so many years.

It was vain to have recourse to tenderness, or to interpose her authority with her son, who had, in a few hours, discovered an abyss of guilt and crime beneath the sumptuous carpets which he trod ; it was necessary to try other resources, and, be it said in honour of the dangerous talents of the countess, she was not long in inventing them.

“ You do well, cavaliers.” she said, with a proud gesture, and directing a side glance of contempt at the valiant captain of the Free Companions, “ you do well in not wishing to measure your noble swords with that of a base-born peasant, for whose ridiculous arro-

gance we have ourselves to blame in having allowed him to enter our service."

"Señora," replied Ximeno, calmly, to the meditated insults of the countess, "you are a woman, and your words do not offend me ; but if the tongue of any man repeat them, I swear to you that he will soon be food for the dogs of your palace."

"Doubtless, you knew," continued Leonora, without answering him, without even deigning to direct a look at him,—“doubtless you are aware, cavaliers, that the famous Don Ximeno is the son of a miserable Jew."

"Of a Jew !" they all exclaimed with horror.

"Son of a Jew !" repeated Gaston, looking at his mother with more anger than respect, and then added, "give the lie, Ximeno, give the lie to that calumny, and disclose to her the name of your family."

"Yes ! let him deny it, let him tell, let him reveal who he is," repeated the implacable Leonora, whose countenance beamed with satisfaction, at the confidently anticipated effect of her words.

"Speak, Don Ximeno de Acuña ! confound them with a word."

"Call him not Acuña, for as that is not his name, perhaps he will not answer to it ; call him Simon Levi, son of Samuel, a Jew of Mendavia ; call him Ximeno, the name with which he was afterwards baptized."

"A new Christian!" repeated the cavaliers, with one voice.

"Yes, a new Christian, but as good and honourable as any one of you," exclaimed Ximeno, at length, in a tempest of rage, "and braver than you all put together."

"Yes! a new Christian," repeated the countess, with a disdainful smile, "a new Christian, who, to make atonement for a life of guilt, retired to the forest of the royal Bárdenas of Tudela, and there —"

"Silence," shouted the captain, his eyes flashing with fury, and glaring like live coals through the bars of his lowered visor.

The revelation which which was about to issue from the lips of the countess was to him more tremendous than all the rest. It did not concern him greatly to see himself despised for his birth. Ximena knew it already, but the princess, who saw him in the armour of a knight, invited to royal nuptials, and treated as a friend by a prince, knew nothing of his history for two years, and in that portion of his life, alas! how many things were there which might affront him,—how many circumstances, which, related by other lips than his own, and seen by another light than that of love, might overwhelm him with ignominy!

Doña Leonora had made him an object of contempt

to her friends, now she had to render him odious and execrable in the eyes of the princess ; and the very terror of Ximeno pointed out to her with certainty the path to a complete triumph. Resuming her story, therefore, she proceeded in a tone of inexorable determination.

“ Yes, in the forest of the Bárdeñas where he personated — ”

“ Silence, for the love of heaven ! ” again cried the captain, with a less defiant air.

“ No, you will not make me keep silence, now is the time for revealing all.”

“ Oh, pardon, pardon, señora,” exclaimed Ximeno, falling on his knees before the countess.

“ Rise, vile miscreant, I will not allow the bandit, the successor of the famous Sancho de Rota to touch the hem of my garment.”

“ A highway robber ! ”

“ A freebooter ! ”

These exclamations, uttered with horror by several knights and by his friend, and even by the Princess of Viana, completely annihilated him.

He rose from the ground, sheathed his sword, and folded his arms in despair.

He had not strength or resolution enough to stir, he thought of nothing ; his disgrace had reached its height, and he was ready to fall dead with shame and rage.

Doña Leonora saw at her feet her expiring victim ; but she was a hyæna, who delighted to prey on carcasses.

“ There he is,—he, who on selling himself into the service of the king of Navarre, assumed the name of Ximeno de Acuña, lived long as the captain of the banditti in the Bârdenas,—You, Mosen Pierres, do you not yet deplore the sack of the town of Milagro ? do you not hear yet the groans of the priests of the Lord, murdered at the foot of the altar, the shrieks of violated women, of children dashed against the wall ? ”

“ Oh, do not recall to me such horrible events.”

“ Well, there stands the captain of that band of assassins.”

“ Señora,” said Ximeno, making an effort to defend himself ; but the weight of the accusation was so enormous, that it quite overwhelmed him, and he had not courage to utter a single word.

“ You, marques, have you forgotten the conflagration in the plains of Tafalla.”

“ Oh ! never.”

“ Well, this person who presumed to measure swords with you, marched at the head of the gang of savages, who, amidst the confusion, ravaged the barns of the farmers, their flocks and herds.”

“ Don Gaston, Don Gaston, defend me,” exclaimed Ximeno, with hoarse and fainting voice.

"Begone, wretch," said his friend, turning his back on him.

"Doña Blanca!"

The princess raised not her forehead, on hearing that supplicating voice.

Ximeno had not now where to turn his eyes. He walked to the door of the apartment with a firm and proud step; his bearing seemed that of a man, whose mind was serene and tranquil; but his visor concealed a visage pale as death, down which rolled hot big tears of shame and rage.

The cavaliers made way for him, shrinking away as from a leper.

Doña Blanca de Navarre remained in the power of her enemies.

CHAPTER XVII

THE captain had not been long gone from the detested scene of his ignominy, when a timid voice addressed him, as he was passing through the darkest of the corridors, saying "Simon!"

Ximeno stopped not: doubtless the noise of the wind and rain, which violently lashed the strong walls of the castle, and howled through the corridors prevented that voice from reaching his ears, or he was so absorbed in his own thoughts, so enveloped in the cloud of opprobrium which had fallen upon him, that no other sensation could reach him, but that of his disgrace and confusion.

"Simon, Simon!" repeated the same voice.

But the captain passed on, without giving any indication of having heard it.

"Ximeno," it called again in a louder tone, and a woman covered with a long veil, issued from the

obscurity, approached the captain, and placing herself in front of him, continued—

“Is it necessary for me to come and interrupt your progress, and forget a name accompanied with such pleasing recollections, in order to make you answer my voice?”

“Who are you?”

“You refuse to know me now!”

“Ines!”

“Ines, of the castle of Egúarás.”

“Begone, do not approach me; I am a leper, from whom all fly with horror.”

“You will see me at your side, when all men forsake you, and you will see me forsake you, when you have one who will console you.”

“Thanks, thanks, Ines,” answered Ximeno, extending his arms to her affectionately, “you don’t know how much good you do me. A drop of water for the lip which is burning with thirst is a much greater boon than a crown.”

“I know not if I can appease the thirst which devours you, I know not if I can give you that drop of water which you pant for, but I will give you the crown which you despise.”

“I do not understand you.”

“I can enable you to confound your enemies.”

"Yes, with my sword."

"No, with your look."

"Ines, I am already sufficiently confounded myself; do not turn my wits altogether with your wild fancies."

"Let us make haste, Ximeno, for you are to sit upon a throne."

"Unhappy girl! unhappy girl, she is doubtless insane."

"Yes, I must be mad to carry my love so far as to give you possession of the woman you adore."

"The princess?"

"Yes, the princess; I know too well to my sorrow the object of your affection."

"She in my possession!"

"You her husband."

"Oh! you are raving, unhappy woman! or you wish to make a jest of me. Sarcasm in addition to disgrace! Leave me, I say. Do you not know that I have been spat upon, trampled on, crushed like a loathsome reptile; do you not know that even the woman I loved had not a look of compassion for me?"

"I know it all; I have witnessed your disgrace and humiliation, as I wish to be the witness of your exaltation and glory; I felt more than once impelled

to throw myself into the middle of the apartment and confound and annihilate your vile enemies with a single word. For they are vile, infamous and contemptible calumniators; doubt it not, Ximeno, they know full well who you are, they know you better than I do, better than you do yourself, and yet they delight in plunging you into ignominy, hoping to see you lose courage when rolled in the mire, become debased, and die unknown."

"But since that is the case," the captain burst forth, now regarding Ines with wonder and respect, "why did you restrain yourself? why did you not utter that word?"

"Because at that moment it would have been received with a burst of laughter; because there are words which either ought not to be pronounced, or uttered only by authorized lips, or accompanied by undeniable proofs."

"Ines, Ines, you will make me believe you; you will make me again believe in God, in whose goodness I doubted for a few moments; you will make me not repent having left the false for the true religion; you will make me admire your constancy, and wonder at your zeal and tenderness; in one word, you will cause me to love you."

"Alas! not that Ximeno, and now less than ever;

it has cost me very dear to mistake a moment of pity, of hallucination, of cruel kindness, for that ardent love which you bear for the princess, and which I coveted."

"But what means this language? what are these mysteries which surround me?"

"Let us quickly leave this castle, and you will know all."

"But if such is your power, why do we quit this place, leaving—"

"Leaving your Ximena in the power of your enemies, is it not so?" interrupted Ines with a melancholy smile, "Oh, that I should have trusted in his words of love! Let us leave her, for so it is best for you both; let us leave her in order to see her again very soon—Now show the sentinel the Countess's ring."

While holding this conversation they had reached the principal gate of the castle, and Ximeno, instead of contenting himself with showing the signet of the princess, threw the ring disdainfully at the feet of the sentinel.

"Sir," said the latter to him, "you will have to wait a moment."

"Wait! for what? Shall I not even be allowed to leave this infernal castle?"

"Sir, I said so on account of the weather which is still more infernal. Do you not see what a tempest there is of wind and rain?"

"What does it matter? Let us go forth."

Ines wrapped herself up in her cloak, took the captain's arm, and, exposed to the pelting rain, they passed the narrow drawbridge.

"And now, where are we going?"

"To the house of Rachel."

"Of my aunt?"

"When I had the happiness of meeting you, for such it is always to me; when I was descending the principal staircase as you were entering with the litter, and you came up to ask me for Don Gaston, I had just heard the narration of a certain story, which linked to others which had been repeated to me by my good mother Rachel, for so I must call her, deprived me of the last atom of a feeble hope that I should be yours, that the void in my heart could ever be filled. Do not wonder at it; a single day had contained this balm of life, and neither disdain nor neglect, nor a long year of forgetfulness, could make that fragrant essence cease to pervade my bosom. But until then, Simon, I did not know you, till then, I was ignorant that a new gulf separated me from you. Somewhat recovered from the agitation

caused by so fortunate, and at the same time so sad a discovery, I was going with the intention of reproaching Rachel—”

“But is Rachel alive?”

“Yes, she lives; Sancho de Rota, who murdered my father, let her go because she was humble and poor. I was going, then, to reproach her for not having been frank with me—for having concealed from me the names which figured in certain histories.”

“But what names are these? What are those histories?”

“She—she will tell you them.”

“For the love of heaven, Ines, speak quickly; my anxiety is great; I prefer hearing all from your mouth.”

“Ah! ambition, ambition! how easily do men substitute one passion for another!”

“Ines, when the heart of a youth has suffered its first disappointment, it is very agreeable to find illusions which may occupy the place of those which have deserted him. I have just lost an angel I adored, a friend on whom I relied; but if I find in you a sister, and in Rachel a mother, the void which surrounds me will not then be so terrible. In this alone are comprised all my desires; here my hopes end. The promises you make me are fables, which

can only for a moment amuse the imagination of a child."

"They are not fables, they are true," said Ines, with a firm tone.

"But perhaps the influence of Rachel's sorceries might—Remember, Ines, that I am a Christian, and that my religion condemns enchantments."

"It is not by enchantments, nor by wicked arts, that you are to ascend a throne together with the woman who loves you. Have you forgotten those words, 'Simon is worthy of you, and you are worthy of a prince.'"

"Oh! explain them to me, I entreat you."

"Enter, enter here, and you will hear the story from other lips."

They were in front of a hut, from the door of which issued a glare of light.

"Where are we?" cried Ximeno aloud.

"By Jingo, master, is it you? come in this way if you wish to be treated like a king," shouted a voice from within the house—a voice well known to the captain of the Free Lances.

"Chafarote!" cried the latter, agreeably surprised.

"Come in, master, for we have a whole forest of wood burning here, and some cheering liquor."

Ines and Ximeno crossed the threshold of the

humble cottage, the first apartment of which was the kitchen, occupied almost entirely by the spacious chimney ; large benches of walnut-tree extended in front and at both sides, and in the middle blazed a faggot of wood, whose clear and brilliant flame illumined the blackened walls.

On one of the benches was seated an old woman, with a dry and wrinkled visage ; her head covered with a species of white turban, with blue stripes ; and her shoulders with a cloak of an indefinable colour.

Stretched along the side benches, two rustic mountaineers slept and snored, under the genial influence of the fire.

The interview of Rachel with her nephew, Ximeno, was at first cold and severe ; and the young man was somewhat disconcerted at this unexpected seriousness. The old woman, however, could not long maintain her austerity ; and whatever might be the motives which prompted such singular indifference, they gradually gave way before the deeply meditative and melancholy aspect of that Simon whom she had loved so much.

She inquired of her beloved Ines about the extraordinary events in the castle, while the captain went to see his squire Marin, who was stretched on a bed

as hard as iron, in a den close to the kitchen. Chafarote wished to supply his master with more conversation than he wanted, and would relate to him how, after being thought dead, he recovered strength enough to sit up, on the field of battle, and by the assistance of an old Jewess, who happened to be wandering about there, was enabled to reach that hut, where the same old woman attended to his wounds; but the captain returning to the kitchen, seated himself near the chimney, and without removing a single piece of his armour, raised his visor in order to hear better the relation of the worthy Rachel; who looking at him now and then with eyes of affection and wonder, and taking, with maternal solicitude, his cold hands within her dry and burning palms, spoke somewhat in the following terms:—

“A certain high personage loved a woman whom no one surpassed in beauty, as none excelled him in rank. She was also loved by another gallant, who was so much the more jealous, the less his affection was returned by her; but in spite of him, the favoured lover used to see her every night, with so much precaution as entirely to escape observation. I was her confidante, and I knew that the lady would soon be a mother, but the disdained lover also came to suspect it; and one night, just after the unhappy woman had given birth to a beautiful boy, a hurried knocking

was heard at the door. She supposed it was the father, who came on the wings of impatience to embrace his new-born son, when the jealous and detested lover appeared on the threshold, and, blind with fury and jealousy at discovering the truth, he stabbed with his dagger the hapless mother, who had scarcely time, after her severe pains, to stamp a kiss on the lips of her babe."

"Heavens! what horror."

"The ruffian would not let even the innocent creature escape, and with his sword reeking with the mother's blood, attempted to transfix the child; but I averted the blow, which by good fortune, only made a slight wound in one of his arms."

"Great God!" exclaimed Ximeno, involuntarily putting his hand on his left shoulder.

"What are you doing?"

"Aid me, señora, to take off this armour; I think I must have a scar here."

"I have seen it often," said Rachel, smiling affectionately.

"Oh! continue, continue your story, I entreat you."

"In moments of blind fury, the interposition of any trifling obstacle may sometimes restrain crime, may arrest the course of disastrous events; and thus it was that my feeble body, placed between the steel of the

homicide and the innocent babe, sufficed to save its life. The assassin, filled with horror at his crime, fled with precipitation, leaving in a pool of blood, the body of the hapless mother, who in her efforts to save her child, leapt, while in the agonies of death, from her bed, and expired in the middle of the floor. I expected every minute that the father would appear, demanding from me his idolised lover, I was a Jewess ; all the others Christians ; the favoured lover did not even know the existence of another rival, the suspicion of the assassination might light upon me ; all persons of our religion are treated barbarously by Christians ; I was horrified at the idea of being put to the torture, and shuddered at the thought of expiring after frightful sufferings on a faggot. I took, therefore, the new-born child in my arms ; I collected the letters and papers of the mother, whatever in short might justify me, prove the origin and birth of the child, and secure his life and mine ; only, to put the father off the scent, I said to a servant on leaving, that the lady had given birth to a girl. I had an opportunity that very night of embarking in a galley, which sailed for Barcelona ; in that city I met my sister Sarah, who was married to a Jew called Samuel Levi, with whom she had come from Navarre, on mercantile business ; and informing me

that they had been married many years without issue, sterility being regarded as the greatest reproach among the Jews. she entreated me to give her the child, who should pass for their son, when, after the lapse of some time, she returned to Navarre with her husband. I thought there could be no better means of concealing the theft as long as it seemed convenient to me. Yielding then to this consideration, I consented to part with the infant in order that Samuel and his wife might take care of him. I had also a real pleasure in this, that he who was born to be the enemy of our religion, should be educated and instructed in it by his brethren."

"Heavens!" exclaimed Ximeno, who had listened to the Jewess with the most intense anxiety, "but am I that child?"

"You have said it."

"Who was my father? who was my mother?"

"Your mother's name was Catalina Marini."

"And my father, who is my father?"

"Your father is called Alphonso the Magnanimous, king of Naples and Arragon."

"Great God, son of a king! and you have concealed this so long! Where, where are those papers? Where are these proofs? Give me them instantly; they are mine, they belong to me."

"These papers are not in my possession."

"And who has them?"

"Doña Leonora de Foix."

"The Countess de Foix?"

"Yes."

"My mortal enemy! Fool that I am to have believed for a single moment in my good fortune, when my heart mistrusts it. But how have you dispossessed me of my titles, of my name, of my family! Oh, quick, quick, these papers," cried Ximeno, seizing Rachel by the throat, "restore what you have robbed me of, or you will perish by my hands."

"Away, madman," exclaimed the Jewess, in a bitter but calm tone, do not recompense with a crime the service I rendered you, in saving your life. Thus it is with all men! the first step they take in the path of prosperity is ingratitude. Viper, whom I cherished in my bosom, the first indication of having recovered life, is to sting her that fostered you."

"Oh, forgive me, señora," cried Ximeno, ashamed of his violence.

"I ought to have forgotten you as soon as you abandoned my religion, and nevertheless, I loved you, and went to seek you, bringing happiness to you in the woman, with whom you should unite your lot; for the happiness of this world consists in walking between two

angels, the invisible angel who accompanies us from the cradle to the grave, on the left, and the visible angel, to whom man gives the name of spouse, on the right. So noble is the being I destined for you, so celestial her virtues, so extraordinary her beauty, that blinded as you were by another passion, when you opened your eyes for an instant, you also opened your heart to love her ; but this love of a single day has been her disgrace, her misfortune, her perdition. You loved her like the flower that is plucked, fades, dies, and is forgotten. Look at her, look at her wasted countenance, her faint smile, her lustreless eyes, her pallid hue. Recollect what she was when you first saw her, and contemplate your work, unhappy man ! You have disgraced her, wounded her to the death, deprived her of hope, and she only lives, because she has the instinct of being still able to do good. Well, the victim of your caprice is the only being who had compassion on me, who did not despise me, who loved me ; she is my daughter, my more than daughter—she is my mother, my angel, my God. For her I would have given a thousand lives, and for her happiness, bartered the whole world. When she returned to my bosom, when I saw her tears and knew the cause of them, I wished to avenge her by placing in the hands of the countess the proofs

of your exalted origin, which were solicited by the latter with great eagerness, with reiterated urgency ever since she had divined the truth from some words I had let fall. Nevertheless, when I looked upon you again, the bitterness of my heart gradually passed away. I divested you of your warlike accoutrements, and saw you as a child weeping in my arms ; I saw you as a peasant boy playing with your companions ; but when you seized me with that iron-covered hand, I saw you as a Christian. treating, as they all do, harshly and cruelly the poor Jewess who now despises you."

Rachel ceased ; all preserved a profound silence, disturbed only by the snoring of the mountaineers, who appeared to sleep soundly.

"What does it avail me to be the son of a king," said Ximeno at last dejectedly, "if I have no means of proving it, and all forsake me?"

"I will never forsake, while I see you alone," exclaimed Ines, with persuasive sweetness.

"Oh ! to be the son of a king, equal and superior to those who have treated me with contempt, and not be able to say so, to proclaim it aloud, for want of evidence !"

"Do you wish to recover the documents ?" said the Jewess, suddenly.

"At the cost of my life."

"What would you do with them?"

"Show them to Doña Blanca, and embrace her;—show them to the countess and her adherents, and then throw them in the fire."

"Well, the countess is disposed to restore them to you."

"All?"

"All."

"At what price?—What does she require of me?"

"Of you, nothing."

"Of whom then?"

"Of the princess, a crown."

"Oh!—these are chimeras."

"For these papers the princess must renounce the throne of Navarre."

"Never."

"And as she knows the ascendancy which you possess over her sister, she is certain that, with one word from you, she will sign the renunciation, although she has refused to do so for so many years."

"Oh! this has all the appearance of a plot."

"I don't say that it has not."

"In which you are an accomplice."

"I obeyed the promptings of revenge, as I now obey the sentiment of pity with which you inspire me."

"Never!—I will never permit Doña Blanca of Navarre to divest herself of her rights in order to exalt an adventurer."

"Ximeno, I thought you ambitious."

"And I was only proud."

"And now what do you mean to do?"

"Return to the Bârdenas, form an alliance with the partisans of the princess, enter Bearne with my valiant Free Lances, and raze the castle of Orthez to the ground, if it were necessary, in order to rescue Doña Blanca, and punish the Countess de Foix."

"And would it not be better to try and recover, by stratagem, the papers which you require?"

"Ah! Rachel, are you willing to be reconciled to me?"

"I am easily reconciled with whatever is great and generous."

"Thanks, mother," exclaimed Ines, who had hitherto remained sad and silent; "I again recognize you in these words,"

"I vow to Satan you are first rate diplomatists," cried, at this point, one of the peasants, who were stretched on the benches, as he sat up, stretching himself, and yawning, with rustic simplicity of manner, while he crossed himself so as to signify his disapprobation of what had been said.

"What! peasant, have you heard us?"

"Of course I have, señor, for I am not deaf, and you did not speak in a whisper."

"What people are these?" asked the captain of the Jewess.

"I don't know;—I never ask the name of my guests. It rained—they asked shelter—I offered them my house—they would not accept my supper, and they lay down on that bench."

"Be under no apprehension, sir," replied the peasant, "we are not spies of the countess;—on the contrary, we think of assisting our queen and mistress, Doña Blanca."

"How?"

"Now with our counsels, and afterwards with our swords."

"Who are you?"

"It does not matter what my name is."

"Your face is not unknown to me," replied Ximeno, "and I think I have seen you, although I don't remember where."

"Neither does it matter, whether you have seen me or not, provided no time is lost in foolish projects. Zounds! it seems as if you thought the castle of Orthez only built of rashers of bacon, which you could devour with a handful of adventurers; or do

you fancy that, if the Queen of Navarre is in danger there, her sister Doña Leonora will keep her safe and sound till you come to her succour with your band? And you too, Jewess, do you think the countess places so little value on these old papers and parchments that you can wrest them from her, with all your tricks and sorceries? And even if you were to invoke the devil himself, do you not know that hawks don't pick out hawks' eyes — ?”

“Well, then, what is your plan?”

“Sir, my plan is much more simple. What is Señora Ines doing here?—losing time. Let her return to the castle; let her endeavour to ascertain in what part of the building they have placed the princess; if she can, and I don't think it difficult, let her come to an understanding with the princess, and even with the youthful Gaston; let her inform us of everything, and introduce gradually into the castle a dozen men, trusty, resolute, and daring fellows, who will, in a twinkling, take possession of the countess and rescue Doña Blanca. The princess will be escorted in her flight by half a dozen cavaliers, who will be waiting for her at the gate.”

“A magnificent project!” exclaimed Ximeno, “but it smacks of the rural simplicity of a mountaineer. We want nothing else to put it in execution except the

dozen daring men within the castle, and the half-dozen cavaliers to boot."

"If you wish these dozen faithful and determined servants of the Princess of Viana to appear before you, at this moment, I have nothing more to do than take out this whistle, go to the door, make a concerted signal, and you will, in a trice, see before you the dozen, neither more nor less. If you wish to see the cavaliers, come with me, and you may count them one by one."

"But who are you?"

"At the head of the former, you, Don Ximeno of Arragon, will lead the way; and at the head of the others, I, the Count de Lerin, will remain outside," said the mountaineer, taking off the cap which he had worn so as to conceal his eyes, and throwing back the coarse cloak in which he was enveloped.

"Are you he who —?"

"Sir," interrupted the count, gravely, "let not the prince remember the affronts which the peasant received."

"And who is your companion?" asked Ximeno, somewhat abashed at the count's words.

"My companion," said he of Lerin, "is an acquaintance of yours, and who will prove to you that if you have had the good fortune to see the princess

again, and been enabled to rescue her, I have contributed somewhat to the satisfaction you must feel. Ho! Mr. Sluggard," added the count, rousing the peasant not in the gentlest manner. "Up! how infernally lazy you are. Come, now you will be convinced that this fellow, at least, does not sham sleep, and that he belongs to that class of men who leave to others the care of thinking for them. Ferrando! Ferrando!"

This time the count accompanied his shouts with hints of a somewhat more efficacious nature, and the rubicund page started awake, rubbing his eyes, and turning his face to the wall, unable to bear the glare from the fire.

Ximeno recognised the herald from the Countess de Foix.

The Count de Lerin and the captain of the Free Lances, now become friends, withdrew to a corner of the apartment, where they concerted their plan in whispers.

The first indication of their scheme being arranged was the departure of Ines, who soon sallied forth and proceeded rapidly towards the castle of Orthez.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ET us return to the Princess of Viana, whom we left in the power of the implacable Countess de Foix, who separated her by such infamous means from the captain of the Free Lances.

Doña Blanca, annihilated by that terrible blow, allowed herself to be conducted mechanically by her sister, who presented her in her nun's dress in the midst of the ball-room, making all believe that she had renounced not only the crown of Navarre, but all worldly pomp. But when the princess, perceiving the artifice, was about to reveal to all present that she was forced to dress herself in those garments, that neither her lips nor her heart had ever pronounced monastic vows; when she was going to demand the dress which suited her rank, and protest against the violence of her enemies, Doña Leonora led her to a retired apartment, and leaving her within, closed the doors, securing them with keys and padlocks. She

then returned serene and tranquil to the festive halls, observing to those who had remarked the disappearance of the princess, that as the austerity of her new life did not allow her to partake in the pleasures and excitements of the feast, she had withdrawn in order to pray to heaven for blessings on the bride and bridegroom, whose auspicious union she wished to authorize with her presence, in order to give an undeniable proof of her reconciliation with her sister.

The few cavaliers who were acquainted with the truth of the facts were interested in concealing it, and by this means, and by aid of the most refined hypocrisy, the most consummate audacity and wickedness, the Countess of Foix was enabled to attain all that she so ardently desired. In the eyes of the world her sister had renounced the crown, and to obtain the results of this apparent renunciation she kept the princess a prisoner.

Nevertheless, Don Gaston de Foix had not yet given his hand to Madeleine; and after his discovery of so horrible a plot, after the extraordinary events of that night, it was more than probable that he would obstinately refuse to take a step which was so revolting to him.

His prudent and wary mother announced to the guests, that, as the arrival of her dearest sister was so

much delayed on account of the attempt of some ruffians to take possession of her against her will on the journey, the sacred rite could not be performed that night, but the delay would not exceed a few hours.

She thus avoided the new scandals which might arise from the resistance of her son, whom she hoped to persuade in the short space during which the ceremony was delayed. In great intrigues all questions are questions of time. Following out her design, a short time after the disappearance of her guests, some of whom were lodged in the castle and others in the city, Doña Leonora repaired to the chamber of her son and, with tears, entreaties, and promises, endeavoured to convince him.

Don Gaston, tortured by the stings of remorse, knew that he might make a not unsterile sacrifice for the princess if, before resigning himself to it, he succeeded in obtaining some concessions in favour of the unfortunate captive.

Since his marriage was a sort of iniquitous bargain, he wished to purchase, at the price of his liberty and happiness, some portion of what his parents were selling.

"Well, madam," he said to his mother, "I shall give my hand to Madeleine, but the princess must be

treated with the consideration which your sister deserves."

"Did you ever imagine any thing else of me?"

"And she shall have a lady, in whom she can confide, to bear her company, and serve her."

"I promise you that."

"Ines, for instance."

"Ines! She who contributed to the deception with the ring."

"What! you refuse?" said Don Gaston, in a threatening tone.

"No, Ines, be it —"

"Mother, since, you begin to appear generous, finish by being just. Permit Doña Blanca, your sister, innocent, simple, and free from ambition as she is, to live at freedom, the mistress of her actions."

"Oh! you ask much, my son," interrupted Leonora, with a strange smile! "you know how much you can sway my heart, and you abuse your power."

"Madame, promise it to me. She does not wish to reign; I know it, mother; she wishes to live, and live in freedom."

"Well! I will not say that—in course of time—"

"Quick, mother, do not defer this pleasure to your son, and that consolation to your sister."

"You exact a great deal, my friend," said Leonora,

with the same smile. "How well you know your worth!"

"Ah! is it possible that you will make this concession to me?"

"Within a month."

"No, no; that is a long time.

"Well then, let it be within four days."

"And why not to-morrow even?"

"Why, man, you must not be in such a hurry; it is essential that Blanca remain here as long as the festivities continue."

"Well be it so."

"So, then, the marriage to-morrow?"

"And after the ceremony, the liberty of the princess."

Leonora left the room, smiling to herself with an air of triumph.

Meanwhile the ill-fated queen groaned in her captivity, where she lay at the mercy of her implacable enemies, who had already given terrible proofs of how they could avenge the unheard of crime of coming a few months sooner into the world, and grasping a sceptre which was bequeathed her by her ancestors.

Forsaken and alone, dissolved in a flood of tears, she strained her eyes around, and her longing looks

fell dead against the silent and darksome walls of her chamber. She went to the grating of the tower, and only saw in the distance the blue peaks of the Pyrenees, where she wished to wander forgotten by the world, and a small portion of the heavens, which she regarded as the term of her sufferings and her hopes, and the birds which sped at will through the sky, that expanse which never appears so great and magnificent as from the narrow bars of a prison. But neither the loss of her liberty nor the certainty of her death grieved her so much as the remembrance of Ximeno, the man she loved, and whom she had seen outraged, confounded, humiliated before her eyes. Sometimes the daughter of a hundred kings had felt ashamed of having placed her affections on the despised Jew, on the execrated bandit of the Bardenas; but now she, the persecuted, the captive, who owed all her misfortunes to the throne, frequently accused herself for not having had courage enough to throw herself into the arms of Ximeno when he was overwhelmed with contempt and ignominy.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "as a queen they persecute and imprison me, as the lover of a Jew and a bandit they would have despised me, like himself, and with him they would have left me free!" And then, she

added, "Oh ! how wretched is my lot, since so great an opprobrium seems preferable to such unhappiness."

In these and other such reflexions Blanca passed the rest of the night and the morning of the following day. Sometimes she was interrupted by the troublesome visits of a female jailer, covered with a long veil who left her supplies of food, and went away without asking a single question or uttering a single word. The princess refused to taste those viands, and even to allay the thirst by which she was devoured, for she would have regarded it as equivalent to committing suicide to touch with her lips any food that came from that family of poisoners.

She was waiting for a visit from her mute jailer, in order to prostrate herself at her feet, and ask her to give her, not liberty, but a little water of which she herself should partake, when the door of the apartment opened, and in walked Ines, who with tears in her eyes, gave her an affectionate embrace, saying, "Be comforted, Señora, I am come to weep with you."

"Although it be but for a few moments, my gratitude will be eternal."

"No, it is not far so short a time," replied Ines, "although I wish it were ; I come to unite my lot with yours while you remain in this castle ; I come to

live with you, to weep with you, to converse with you, about whatever will be most agreeable to you."

"How! you also a prisoner, you also deprived of liberty! Perhaps your only crime has been the compassion you have shown for my misfortunes."

"My imprisonment is voluntary, princess; but, indeed, to tell the truth, it is not so, as my soul has been for some time governed by another will than mine."

"Who then? who sends you? what do your words mean? is there any one in the world who thinks of me?"

Ines perceived that she had been very imprudent in uttering these words.

"Señora," she said to her, "I came here by the will of your sister."

"Do not say that, Ines; I would regard you with horror."

"The Prince Don Gaston, has just married a woman he abhors, and the reward of this sacrifice, exacted by his parents, is some greater comfort and indulgence in your imprisonment, from this moment, together with the society of some person who loves you; and Don Gaston, Señora, thinks that there is no one here in Orthez that loves you as much as I do. If Don Gaston has erred, select any one you like in my place, and I will still ask you on my knees to allow me to remain with you in addition to the person of your choice."

"Thanks, Ines! it is only a few hours since I first knew you, but it is enough for me that you deserve the confidence of Ximeno—"

"Ah!"

"His appreciation, his esteem."

"Ah! yes, his esteem, his appreciation are enough for me," exclaimed Ines painfully wounded.

"Ines, since the esteem of Ximeno satisfies you, tell me, do you know him? have you always known him?" asked the princess with disquietude.

The maiden thought she could discern in these questions a doubt, a suspicion as to her adored lover's nobleness of soul, and could not help replying with a certain ill-repressed animation—

"I have always known him, Señora, always! and because I know him I say that a smile of approbation from the son of Samuel, from Ximeno, the captain of the banditti, the captain of the Free Lancers, might well flatter the vanity of a queen."

"You do not know, Ines, with how much pleasure I listen to you. Ah! you do not know how sweet to me are the praises of Ximeno, nor how much I need to hear them at this moment! Ximeno, Ximeno, sprung from an accursed race, may have a noble, pure, untainted mind, but Ximeno the captain of a band of robbers—"

“And for whose sake was it, Señora, that the timid lamb of Mendavia was suddenly converted into the raging lion of the Bârdenas? For whom think you? You are the last person that ought to reproach him with his terrible exploits. Powerless to avenge the wrong you suffered at Mendavia, and still more powerless to deliver you from the hands of enemies who must have been of great influence, although they were unknown to him, he performed prodigies of valour, he made tremendous efforts to make himself also strong, powerful, formidable. His acts of incendiarism had no other object than the destruction of castles in order that he might break open your prison doors, his ravages were investigations which he set on foot from house to house in the hope of finding you; his murders were only acts of vengeance on those whom he suspected of keeping you in prison. And in all those terrible deeds he did nothing more than chastise the great lords of the earth, desolated so long by their measureless ambition. Ximeno grasped the scourge of divine wrath, and it resounded incessantly over the heads of our oppressors. Ximeno was great, Señora, as captain of adventurers, even greater than as Prince of Naples and Arragon—”

“What do you say?”

"Oh, I do not know what I say, Señora, but when Ximeno is outraged—"

"But you said—I know not what—of Naples—did I hear amiss?"

"Yes! you have heard that Ximeno is a prince."

"Heavens! do not mock me."

"Prince of Naples and Arragon."

"Do you speak seriously?"

"Son of King Alphonso the Magnanimous."

"Peace, Ines, for you will kill me with joy; Ines, tell me the truth, do not mock me—remember I love him."

"Oh! and did you wait to hear that he was born, like yourself, near a throne, before you would avow that you loved him?" Ines burst forth indignantly. "Do you think that you will not now have to blush for a passion, which hitherto only brought you disgrace? Will this discovery, peradventure, diminish the weight of his guilt, if he has been guilty of crimes? Is the soul of the prince, as you see him, of more value than that of the bandit, as I see him?"

"You are cruel to me, Ines! What have I done to you, I, a poor woman who have been persecuted from my cradle, neglected by all, married in early youth to a man I detested, divorced by him, thrust

from his bed, in a few days, with scandal and ignominy? What has this woman done to you, who has had no other avenger than heaven, who has trod only the floor of the prison-house, who has never heard the endearments of a mother, who has been constantly persecuted by her father, and threatened by her brothers and sisters? What has she done to you that you should treat her thus? Oh! am I so utterly unfortunate, that even those who come to console me, perhaps against their will, exchange their consolations for insults? Ah! perhaps you love Ximeno. Do you really love him? Listen, Ines, my youth is past: persecuted, always buried in towers and dungeons, I have never seen any one fix on me a look of affection; I have seen no one smile sweetly on me, if not for my beauty, at least for my misfortunes—for, Ines, even my jailors have told me that I was beautiful. I have reached the period when the soul prepares to take its leave of pleasure and of love; and in this autumn of my life, in the evening of my age, I found at length the looks, the smiles to which I was hitherto a stranger. A youth, of humble condition, but of noble heart, loved me; perhaps that I might measure with a single word of his the depth of the gulph which had till then separated me from happiness. I loved him also. And

how could I fail to love him, if my heart was for so many years hoarding up treasures of tenderness, to shed them all at once on the heart of Ximeno ? I loved him, Ines, I loved him, and nothing but the habit of being unfortunate, together with my education, and the habit of seeing things from an elevated point of view, could have made me unjust towards him."

"Forgive me, Señora, I love Ximeno, it is true ; but I love his happiness more, and therefore I also love you."

"Oh ! you love him, and you accompany him everywhere ; you love him, you have always known him, and deserve his confidence, and received him on his arrival at the castle, and have since followed his steps, and you came to me, perhaps, to gratify his wish, not that of the countess ! You love him ! Ah, Ines, among the immense catalogue of my sufferings, I did not know till now the pangs of jealousy."

"You jealous of me, Doña Blanca ! be silent, for pity's sake, for you will make me die of grief, if you do not make me burst into laughter. You jealous—when jealousy has wasted my flesh, chased away my colour, banished sleep and tranquillity ! You jealous—when I am fed with the poison of jealousy, administered by you. Oh ! enough, enough, you will make me repent the generous design which brings me here.

Know, Señora, I came to restore you to his arms, to deliver you to Ximeno—to the Ximeno whom I adore. I came to restore you to his arms, to see you depart together, without any hope of seeing him again. You will see how he leaves this, without even turning his head to cast on me a single look of gratitude. You will find that my name will never proceed from his lips, and yet you entertain jealousy of me !”

“Yes, Ines, deep and terrible. Such virtue, such generosity and self-denial, reveal so sympathetic a heart, that you cannot but be adored by Ximeno ; and I am not only jealous of you, but even amidst the bitterness of your lot I envy you—yes, I envy a heart so noble, such Christian resignation, so kind and consoling a disposition. Ah ! Ines, I know not why it is ;—perhaps as I have enjoyed but a moment’s happiness for so many long years, I cannot bear to part with it, when once I have begun to feel it. I wish I were able to imitate you ; I wish I could make such efforts and sacrifices as yours ; but I am too weak. Tear out my heart, Ines, but do not tear from me the image of Ximeno !”

“Preserve him, Señora, and be happy with him. My sacrifices are not incomplete ; for although I renounced Ximeno before I knew his illustrious origin, I am now come, after having made that discovery, to

procure your escape, and to give you all the happiness you can desire—liberty, and the possession of his love.”

“Why are you so good, Ines?” exclaimed the princess, folding her arms, and regarding her with absorbed gaze. “Ah! how humiliated do I feel myself beside you? How much would my happiness be marred by the recollection that another woman deserved it better than I?”

“For the present,” answered Ines, with a sad smile, “come and enjoy, without fear, the scanty alleviation of your sorrows, which they have consented to afford.”

“Where do you take me to?”

“To this adjoining room—more spacious, more agreeable, and furnished in a style more worthy of a princess!”

“All prisons are alike, Ines.”

“Not all, Señora; there are prisons like this, which have only one door; there are prisons like this other, which have two, by one of which there is an outlet to the country, and—”

“Let us go, let us go at once,” interrupted Doña Blanca, eagerly obeying the sweet call of liberty.

“You owe also to the solicitude of Don Gaston,

and the consent of his mother, apparel more suitable to your rank than this monastic disguise."

"What does it matter? fine raiment is hateful to me."

"You will put it on, nevertheless, because that which you now wear might betray you in your flight."

"Ines, Ines," exclaimed the princess, embracing her,—*"provident as kind! as devoted as a mother! and yet you are my rival."*

"Come, Señora, come quickly, and I entreat you to tax your goodness of heart so far as not to utter again the name of rival, but to substitute for it that of sister, if you wish to pay for my sacrifice."

"Yes, sister! my sister! I give you that sweet name which hitherto never escaped my lips without horror."

And talking thus they entered the adjoining apartment, where the princess changed her dress.

"Now," said Ines to her, "I am going to try and admit Ximeno, with some of your partisans, into the castle."

"Why!"

"In the first place, to favour your flight; in the second, that he may seize the countess, and try to recover by force the evidence of his birth."

"How! these proofs are in the possession of my sister."

"Yes."

"Are you certain of it?"

"Yes, Señora."

"And have you no other means of obtaining restitution than by force?"

"The most sagacious now see no other."

"Oh! and you are going to expose Ximeno among so many enemies; and were you not afraid of the consequence of his engaging in so unequal a combat? You, Ines, who love him so much, how could you consent to be perhaps the instrument of his death?"

"Oh! you are right. I only obeyed his orders; but I swear to you, Señora, that the idea of his danger caused me more pain than that of losing him for ever."

"Ines," replied Blanca, with determination, "go and call the countess; I have a crown wherewith to purchase these papers."

"What! you would sign the renunciation?"

"Yes; the renunciation of all my rights, my dignity, my name, to give to Ximeno that which belongs to him. For him I will consent to be degraded to the common rank; for him I could descend to the condition from which he rises."

"Ah, princess! and you envy me," exclaimed Ines, regarding her with a look of unspeakable gratitude.

"Quickly, Ines, quickly!"

The damsel hastily departed.

Doña Blanca felt a thirst, a burning thirst, which devoured her. In the slight quivering of her cheeks, tinged with a bright purple, might be observed the symptoms of fever, produced by so many violent and conflicting emotions. A thousand times she wished to put to her lips one of the goblets which the sisterly care and attention of the countess had not forgotten to provide also in that apartment, which was warmed by the fire of an immense chimney: but as often she put it away with horror, dreading lest the bread she ate, the water she drank, and even the air she breathed might, in such captivity, be poisoned.

During these struggles and alternations she was interrupted by the presence of Doña Leonora, her sister.

An unusual paleness and agitation were observable in the features of the countess: her smile, however, was more sweet and gracious than ever, and the expressions which flowed from her quivering lips, although pronounced with a strange accent, breathed tenderness and meekness.

"Blanca," she said to the princess as she entered, "your summons has agreeably surprised me. I have to thank you for remembering your sister, and I came hither only with the desire to do what will be agreeable to you."

"I wish it were in my power to reject every favour which might come to me from your hand," replied the princess, with lofty disdain.

"Your reproaches, sister, are very bitter; but however much they may be so you will not induce me to change my intentions."

The countess bit her lip as she uttered these words, but restraining herself; after a short pause she continued, with that smile which shed a sinister light over her pallid countenance—

"I have deserved, sister, this asperity, and therefore it is but just that I should anticipate, if possible, your dearest wishes."

"Ah! do you know them already? Are you aware of what I am going to ask from you?"

"You are very ungrateful," replied Leonora, with a look of reproach; "I have just made a discovery important to your happiness; I hasten to avail myself of it, and you receive me with so much harshness! I know it; I know it all," pursued the countess, assuming an affectionate freedom of manner; "you

love a man whom we supposed to be of the humblest origin. What must have been your delight when you discovered that he is worthy of you by his birth !”

“ I did not require to know it in order to love him,” answered Blanca, who could not suppress her contempt.

“ To love him, no, dear sister, for the heart is free, the passions blind, and we cannot dispose of our affections at will ; but if not to love, to confess that you love him. Your love, which now weighs as a reproach upon your forehead, will be in future a halo encircling you with glory and happiness.”

“ I know that you have in your possession the proofs of his high birth ; I know that so possessing them, you have infamously calumniated him, and I believe you know at what price I wish to purchase them. Tell me, then, if it suits you to part with them on such terms.”

“ I ask nothing. I shall very soon deliver them all up to you. Ximeno will very soon be recognized as the natural son of Alphonso V. of Arragon, and his illegitimacy is of little consequence in these times. The Count de Lerin is descended from a bastard of our grandfather ; from the bastard of another grandfather is descended the Marquis de Cortes, marshal of Navarre, the head of my partisans. You may well

proclaim your love and be united for ever with the object of your affection."

"Ah!"

"You, who have been always unfortunate," pursued Leonora, observing that her sister was relaxing in her severity, "you may obtain with usury the happiness which heaven has hitherto denied you. With those papers I will also grant you your liberty. Go forth, tender and affectionate hearts, go forth and breathe, in unrestrained freedom, the atmosphere of enjoyment; time and space are yours, and let happiness also attend you."

"My sister, oh, my sister!" said the princess at length, carried away by an outburst of tenderness, "what do you wish in return? Speak, answer. Is it my life that you desire? I will give it you for one hour of happiness. My crown? draw up, draw up at once the deed of renunciation, and I will sign it, without caring to look at it."

"Your life is very precious to me," replied the countess, with more than her usual affability, "your life, extended over long and prosperous years, will be to me as a balm which will scar over the wounds inflicted by remorse. The crown—yes. It is true that it does not yet gird your brows, beloved sister, and it would be necessary to shed much blood before

you should be able to seat yourself on the throne. Let us spare our country, then, so great a calamity ; renounce your rights, write to the leaders of your party to desist from rash attempts. Yours, dear sister, will be the peaceful joys of domestic life, the tender light of love, the delightful perfume of virtue, the homage, the respect of the good, an unspotted reputation, unbounded happiness ; while mine will be the cares and anxieties which lurk under the shadow of a throne, the ephemeral splendour which surrounds it, the turmoil, the restlessness of a court life, and, as my only solace, my only consolation, the aggrandizement of my son, and the love and esteem of my sister."

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed the princess, overjoyed, "I willingly resign to you that dignity. I am satisfied with my destiny ; do you wish for more, Leonora?"

"Yes, I wish for more," answered the countess in a hollow muffled tone ; I wish for what I have never obtained—an embrace from my sister."

"Leonora, Leonora!" cried the princess, straining her to her bosom.

And the two sisters remained long in this posture, Doña Blanca sobbing with tenderness, Doña Leonora with dry eyes, restless look, and sinister expression.

"Another favour I am going also to ask of you, sister," said the princess, "I am dying of thirst—for many hours I have not tasted a drop of water ; forgive me if I ask you to give me to drink, and request you to partake from the same glass."

"Why not, sister?" replied Leonora, her voice somewhat flurried either from joy or terror. "Why should we not share our food as we have just shared our destinies? Sit down ; my poor sister, I remarked in the heat of your hands the fever which consumes you. Sit down, I will add to the water three drops of a liquid which will refresh your blood ; and that you may see that it is a harmless and healthful medicine, I shall drink first the half of the glass."

Doña Blanca then remembered the death of her brother, and could not help asking the Countess with alarm—

"And you will drink of the same cup, will you not?"

"I shall do so first," answered Leonora, with a sweet smile, "and I will drink to our eternal union and friendship," she added, with serene voice, while she approached the deep goblet to her quivering lips.

The princess observed that her sister drank the half of the beverage without any repugnance, and as

if agitated by deep sorrow she fell at her feet, exclaiming with sobs. "Forgive me, sister, forgive me."

"What is the matter," replied the countess, raising her with one hand, and pouring, at the same time, with the other into the golden goblet, a reddish liquid contained in one of her rings.

"Forgive me!"

"Blanca, tell me what is wrong with you, what mean these transports? What ails you?"

"Leonora, I confess it. I had suspicions of you—the death of Carlos—our hostilities—made me doubt the sincerity of your repentance, and I thought this was a plot laid for my destruction."

"For your destruction! with what object; in what manner?"

"Yes; I will tell it at once. I thought—forgive me, sister—I thought that this goblet might be poisoned."

"Heavens! what horror! Did you not see that I drank the half?" exclaimed the countess, trembling.

"Yes, and by that I discovered my error," said the princess, and taking the much-longed-for goblet in her hands, added, "To the perpetual reconciliation of two sisters, who must doubly love one another

henceforward to make up for their former want of affection. My sister! may God bless you in your children; may you sit on the throne of Navarre, and may they succeed you; may God grant you the happiness he has denied to me, and forget your faults, as I forget and forgive the injuries which you have done to me."

And as she uttered these words, the unsuspecting, simple, angelic princess drained the goblet.

The paleness of her sister's countenance then became cadaverous, her agitation febrile and convulsive; she tried to avert her look from the cup, but in spite of herself, her eyes remained fixed on it in petrified gaze.

If Doña Blanca had raised hers at that moment, perhaps she would have suspected a horrible crime, but tranquil as innocence, she said to her sister, as she felt refreshed by the much-longed-for beverage, "Now we are friends for ever,—for ever sisters."

"For ever," repeated Leonora, with a tremulous voice.

"Go now and bring the papers, and I will sign the renunciation."

"The papers are here," answered the countess, rising up, and taking them from her girdle,

"Here!"

“ These papers, which are, perhaps, worth a kingdom, may serve also to feed the fire of this hearth, which is getting low,” replied the countess, throwing them in the flames.

“ Great God ! what are you doing ?”

“ I do not need your renunciation now !” pursued Leonora, in her usual manner ; “ it is now useless.”

And she left the apartment.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE princess was stupified and bewildered. She turned her eyes to the chimney ; there was nothing left but ashes. The glory, the exaltation of King Alphonso's son had passed away, like a meteor which crosses the sky, and illuminates the hemisphere for a moment.

Ximeno was for ever reduced to his former obscure condition.

So sudden and unforeseen a blow was sufficient to confound and annihilate Doña Blanca ; but one still more violent was in store for her. What did the last words of the countess mean ? and still more than her words, what did her imposing calm, her sinister look, her horrid smile portend ? Could she have given poison to her sister in that goblet ? And if so, how had she partaken of the beverage ? What was the meaning of that "it is now useless," uttered in a dry voice, cold and cutting as the axe of the executioner ?

She still remained motionless, in the same posture in which her sister had just left her, when a door opened silently, and Ximeno appeared, muffled in a cloak, and followed by Ines.

Blanca uttered a cry of surprise, or an exclamation of joy, or a groan of sorrow, for we know not which of these sensations it meant to express, or if it expressed them all in one.

"Blanca, dear lady," said Ximeno, throwing aside the garment in which he was enveloped, and disclosing his armour, "Heaven has compassion on us. Ah! I cannot express the joy I feel! You are going to be set free, you are going to be happy. Together we shall go forth from the castle. At the foot of that tower, the most noble and valiant cavaliers of your party, the Count de Lerin, and Don Carlos de Artieda expect us. Come, gentle spirit, angelic soul, purified in the furnace of affliction; come and enjoy the boundless bliss that awaits us."

"Ximeno," exclaimed the princess, with plaintive accent, "Ximeno!" and she could say no more.

"Blanca, my Ximena, do not delay your departure a moment; let us flee from this accursed mansion. I know the great sacrifice you would have made for me—renounce your throne to obtain the evidence of my birth. I now know that Leonora expresses her-

self satisfied with that ; for Ines—this angel of virtue and self-denial, to whom we owe so much—Ines whom I should have loved if I had not loved you—Ines has told me all ; Ines has seen the countess put the precious documents in her girdle. Oh ! do not smile so sadly, my Blanca ; your renunciation can prejudice you in nowise, having been extorted from you by force. Come, leave this, we shall take you to Navarre ; we shall seat you on the throne. Have you heard that I am valiant ? Until I am seen brandishing my sword at the head of your troops, no one can tell what I can do.”

“Ximeno, Ximeno,” repeated the princess, with a piteous accent, which seemed the echo of death, “see me on my knees at your feet.”

“What are you doing, Señora ? what are you doing ?” exclaimed the captain, confounded at seeing Blanca kneeling before him.

“I am asking pardon for not having had courage enough to throw myself in your arms, in the depth of your disgrace.”

“Oh ! why recall the past ? rise, Señora, rise—let us not lose an instant.”

“No, no, I cannot leave this.”

“I do not understand you ; what can detain you in this accursed house ?”

"Ximeno!" replied the princess, pointing with her hand to the chimney, "do you see that heap of black ashes, scattered about by the least breath of air?"

"Well, what of that?"

"It is your glory, your exaltation—it is your crown!"

"How!"

"The princess came here to burn your papers before my eyes."

"Ah! but what signifies that? As long as she does not reduce your heart to ashes, my glory, my pride, my crown will not have perished."

"Ah!" exclaimed the princess, her eyes dimmed with tears, "you don't know that my heart,—my heart cannot be yours long."

"My God! what is the matter, why do you tremble?"

"Ximeno, in recompense for the life which you have so often exposed for me—in recompense for the unheard-of prowess, the incredible exploits with which you have astonished the noble and chivalrous spirits of three kingdoms, do you think I have done much in giving you all, all my love, and in wishing to sacrifice to you my rank and dignity?"

"Señora, your goodness has no bounds; with a

single look you can repay sacrifices a hundred times greater than mine."

"Well then, by all that love, by all that goodness which you ascribe to me, I entreat you most earnestly to depart."

"Ah!"

"To leave me."

"I leave you!"

"To depart with Ines, to love her; to love her, Ximeno, as you said that you should love her if I did not exist."

"Consider, Señora, that this is madness or jealousy; and that neither the one or the other is fitting in so critical a conjuncture, on which a whole life of happiness depends."

"Alas! there is neither jealousy, nor madness, nor happiness," exclaimed the princess groaning; "I cannot be yours, Ximeno, I cannot be yours now, and I wish that departing hence, you would leave me the consolation of knowing that you have repaired the only fault perhaps which you have committed."

"Come, Señora," replied the captain with impatience, "I understand less and less your determination; whether you are to be mine or not I mean to save you, to carry you away from this place, to crown my work. Come, or I shall say that because

I am now reduced to my former humble condition, you are ashamed to follow me, and will not take my arm for fear of being tainted."

"Cease, Ximeno, have pity on me; do you not see my countenance? Fix your eyes on me and see how dreadfully I am suffering!"

"Well, I do forgive you, I understand all the pride of a princess, for I also was a prince for an hour. Why do you suffer? why do you weep? The blow is struck, Señora. I kiss the hand that has smitten me."

"Cruel, cruel!" the princess cried in desperation, "the poison of your words is more active than that which consumes my vitals."

"My God,—poisoned!"

"Yes, poisoned by my sister! with a hell within my breast—suffering horribly! But I forgot my pain, because I saw you joyful; because I listened to the language of love; because your tender and impassioned words distilled, drop by drop, a balm into my heart; but when you wounded me with an unjust suspicion,—when you doubted my love, my generosity, the purity of my soul,—I again began to feel the fire which consumes me—the deadly venom which corrodes my vitals. Ximeno, Ximeno! As my life has been, so also must be my death; abandoned by all, and, as

a final consolation, assailed by reproaches and accusations from those I most loved."

"Forgive me, Ximena,—forgive me!"

"Yes, I forgive,—and I will also say, like you, —The blow is struck, and I kiss the hand of the smiter!"

"But, to die—to die, my beloved. Oh! it is impossible for you to die, while I live. I will seek the countess;—I will oblige her to restore you to life," exclaimed Ximeno, springing like a tiger towards the door, which led to the interior of the palace.

It was secured.

He pushed it violently, with terrible force—almost enough to drive down a wall,—but the door did not yield an atom.

"Oh! come, do not weary yourself fruitlessly. *It is now useless*, said my sister, and she says nothing in vain."

"Vengeance, vengeance," cried the captain; "there are cavaliers at the gate who will help me to avenge you."

"Come, Ximeno!—come Ines! do not leave this,—let me at least die in your arms."

They both approached the chair in which the princess was seated. "Water," said the princess, "give me a little water, for I am burning."

“And if it is poisoned?” observed Ines.

“What does it matter, now?” replied the princess, with a melancholy smile, and drank off a cup which was presented to her. “And now,” she added, after having drank, “now, Ximeno, will you do greater justice to my wishes?—will you say that I am ashamed of you, if I implore you, by the God whom I shall see face to face in a few moments, to love Ines,—to repair the faults which you may have committed towards her,—to give her your hand and promise to be her husband!”

“Think of yourself, Señora, and do not think of me,” said Ines.

“Ah! let me think of him; let me try to procure his happiness, for, Ines, I know that you will love him, as I would have loved him; I know that you will make him as happy as I would have done. Ximeno! as a last favour, I again ask you to give her your hand.”

Ximeno stretched out his hand, the princess took that of Ines, and, joining them, exclaimed, “I do not bless you now, because, in a few moments, I shall bless you more solemnly from heaven.”

The Lovers of the Bârdénas shed copious tears; and such was their dismay, and so tumultuously thronged were their hearts, with sweet, sad, and unspeakable

emotions, that they could express themselves in no other manner.

"The only consolation I feel in leaving the world is that I have made happy her who held me to be her rival," said the princess in a feeble, scarce audible tone.

"As a condition of my happiness," replied Ines, "it would be necessary that you should not have been so unfortunate."

"Now leave me undisturbed for a moment, that I may think on God," said Doña Blanca, and she remained silent a few minutes, her face covered with both hands, beneath which flowed tears of repentance. Ines and Ximeno knelt, and prayed heaven not to forsake the angelic princess in her final hour.

This solemn and religious silence was interrupted by the noise of the principal door, which was thrown wide open.

Blanca raised her forehead, which was serene and pale as marble.

"You come in time," she said to Don Gaston, who had just entered.

"Yes, I come in time; my nuptials are over, the time fixed by my mother for your liberation is now arrived; you are from this moment free."

"Not yet," replied the princess; "you come in time to be able to say to your mother that I forgive her, and thank her for the liberty she has given me."

After her first acute pains, the princess sank into a state of soft languor and tranquillity, in which she no longer felt the slightest pain, and her soul, gently disengaged from its unsullied tenement, flew to heaven without the least trace of convulsion or stertor to mark the peaceful transit of her spirit.

She who had been so unhappy in this world, could not have shrunk from, but rather sighed for, another life which would doubtless be more happy.

Ines and Ximeno, still kneeling before her, after her soul had fled, thought that she was only communing with God in deep prayer.

Don Gaston remained standing, petrified at that melancholy scene, which he understood at one glance.

When Ximeno convinced himself of the truth, when he saw motionless and lifeless the form of her he so much loved, he could not repress his indignation, and rushing to the staircase by which he had penetrated into the castle, he cried with a voice of thunder, "Navarre for Beaumont! vengeance, friends, vengeance!" And, unable to restrain his impatience, he descended to the door of the tower, where he met the Count de Lerin.

"Vengeance!" repeated Ximeno.

"Where are you going?"

"Ascend, ascend quickly, vengeance on the countess! Let us set the castle in flames," exclaimed the

captain of the Free Lances, with the ferocious instinct of the bandit of the Bárdenas.

"In order that the queen may be burnt to death!"

"The queen is dead."

"I feared as much; but are you certain of it?"

"Oh! do you not see my grief?"

"Then, my friend, we must all disperse."

"What! not ascend? not avenge her? and allow Doña Leonora ——"

"Doña Leonora will be your queen."

"And the Count de Lerin speaks thus?"

"The Count de Lerin, when the prince Don Carlos lived, proclaimed Don Carlos King of Navarre; the Count de Lerin, while Doña Blanca lived, proclaimed Doña Blanca, Queen of Navarre; and the Count de Lerin, who has now neither king nor queen to proclaim, would be very silly if he allowed his enemies to have so great an advantage over him."

With these words, that not less wicked man than eminent politician, turned his back upon Ximeno, who, when he saw himself alone, drew his sword, and shattered it, in his indignation, into a thousand pieces against the wall of the castle.

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